

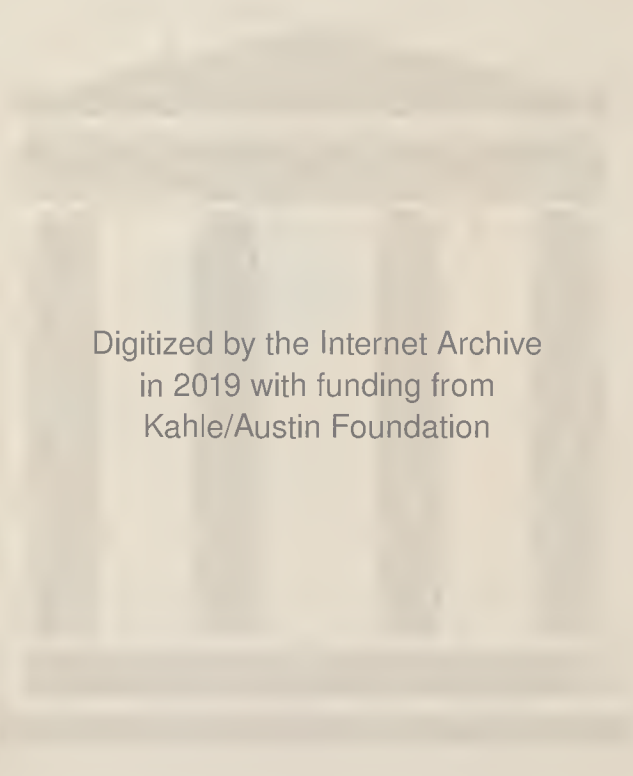


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*EVERYMAN, I will go with thee,*

*and be thy guide,*

*In thy most need to go by thy side*

## ROBERT BROWNING

Born in Camberwell in 1812. First visited Italy in 1834; married Elizabeth Barrett, 1846; lived in Italy, except for brief intervals, from 1846 to 1861, when he settled in London. Died at Venice on 16th December 1889.

Robert Browning's Works in Everyman's Library:

- Vol. I. *Poems and Plays*, 1833-44. Introduction by John Bryson, M.A. No. 41.
- „ II. *Poems and Plays*, 1844-64. No. 42.
- „ III. *The Ring and the Book*, 1868-9. Introduction by John Bryson, M.A. No. 502.
- Vols. IV, V. *Poems and Plays*, 1871-90. Selected, with an Introduction by Mildred M. Bozman. Nos. 964, 966.

# Robert Browning's Poems and Plays

INTRODUCTION BY  
MILDRED M. BOZMAN

IN FIVE VOLUMES  
VOLUME FOUR: 1871-1890



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## INTRODUCTION

Two volumes of Everyman's Library, first issued in 1906, contain practically all Browning's published verse up to and including the *Dramatis Personae* of 1864: a third, issued in 1911, contains his next publication of four years later, *The Ring and the Book*, which is very generally regarded as the peak of his achievement. Browning, however, wrote nearly as much again between this date and his death in 1889, and of this much is not only of the highest quality, but is likely to have a stronger interest and appeal for the modern reader than for the poet's contemporaries and immediate successors.

To those whose school-days fell roughly within the first decade of the present century Tennyson and Browning were presented as twin fixed stars of the Victorian literary firmament. Both were to be revered as glorious, though one might differ from another in glory. Their unlikenesses as men and as poets were, and are, indeed striking, and correspond in part to differences of origin and training. Tennyson, a son of the squirearchy and the public school, was deep-rooted in the traditions of his class and nation—an English gentleman of the English gentlemen of his age. He respected those feelings and conventions of his day which allowed licence to curiosity, research, and speculation in the fields of physical science and (with due decorum), theology, but which held that any too close investigation of human psychology was an offence against religion, morality, and good taste. The study of mankind by man was thought to be so largely *improper* that certain well-established formulae were made to do duty for frank exploration in many regions of conduct and emotional reaction where a puritanic asceticism kept lips pursed and doors closed.

Browning, on the other hand, was, like Meredith, largely self-educated. He went to an undistinguished day-school, and was untouched by the good or by the limiting influences of the school with traditions. He satisfied a natural appetite for wide reading in his father's excellent library, and must in his earlier days have learned much from the father whose educational methods he extolled in old age in a poem called *Development*. He was a good Englishman, but also a good European. Prompted by a desire for knowledge due less to a wish to equip himself thoroughly

or suitably in intellectual things than to a large appetite for life which made him want to share the life-experience, thoughts, and feelings of many races and ages—Greeks, Jews, Arabs, Renaissance Italians—he explored the highways and byways of the literature of these peoples, and also spent a great part of his life on the Continent. His work shows little of that class sense of which Tennyson's is full. Further, it shows no snobbery, not even of the intellectual kind, for he traces the movements of the simple mind and soul with as much passionate sympathy and interest as those of the sophisticated and philosophical.

Browning's province was, without doubt, the *conscious* soul of man. He was a psychologist, 'the first,' writes M. Paul de Reul, in his excellent *Art and Thought of Robert Browning*, 'to carry into poetry, as Balzac did in the French novel, the curiosities and methods of contemporary science.' To the end of his life Browning continued to explore the individual human mind in the act of contemplating its own activities, of constructing its own pattern of reality, of building from the raw material of experience a house of life and a shelter from the void. All values for him inhered in the *person*. His thought did not falter nor compromise about the absolute values of Goodness, Truth, and Beauty, inhering in the Person of God, the life-giving spirit. Men and women too he saw as persons; but life-given, limited, relative, subject to laws of growth and change; not equipped to devise and impose, even on themselves, absolute categories of conduct; under commandment *first* to live and to act out their lives to the full, and secondly to choose in the living between such relative evils and relative goods as they are capable of. He did not, like some rebels, confuse morality itself with the codes and conventions of a particular age. The timidities and exclusions of a puritanical asceticism were foreign to him. The greatest evils to him were the negations, the denials of life. Again and again, as in *The Statue and the Bust*, as in *Bifurcation*, he proclaims that even sinful action is better than no action at all.

'Oh, a lie will serve as well for a test  
As a virtue golden through and through.'

He would have approved of the parable of the Master and the Impetuous Servant in Dame Julian's *Revelations of Divine Love*. His theism, which was substantially if not dogmatically that of central Christianity, and which he held so strongly and proclaimed so vigorously that any parodist of Browning is likely to end his verses with the word 'God,' may, through a double misunderstanding, have done something to disguise from 'conservative' readers in his day, and from 'progressive' ones in ours, the untrammelled frank-

ness of this great casuist's approach to psychological and moral problems. It is possible that if the interior conflicts and dramas, based at times on very 'sordid' stories, which are the subjects of many of his finest poems, had been treated in prose fiction they would, while finding parallels enough in the French novelists of the period, have failed entirely to pass the censorship of Victorian English convention. As it was, Walter Bagehot (who with all his qualities had his share of priggishness and prudery) wrote of Browning's 'nastiness'—a judgment likely to make the modern reader smile.

As has been said, the point of observation from which Browning studied man is man's own self-consciousness. He devised for this purpose the form of the dramatic lyric and dramatic monologue in which, under the convention of a capacity for expression equal to the poet's own, men and women reveal themselves, make their *apologiae* to some particular person, upon some particular occasion of stress, and yet, fundamentally, as before the tribunal of God and their consciences. The men and women thus revealed are of very various races, types, ages, cultural standards, and degrees of mental and emotional capacity, yet all are representatives of a normal, central humanity. Their experience is of the ordinary rich stuff of human experience, even if arranged in patterns of exceptional complexity, violence, or intensity. And set over against and above their human dramas of love, hate, beauty, power, doubt, and aspiration, stands the world of unshakable values and absolutes—heaven.

Browning has little or nothing to say of the mysterious realms between these two which, though they are the conscious experience of the few to-day and have perhaps always been beyond the boundaries of common human interests, yet haunt and colour not only all primitive art, but much of the greatest art of all ages.

Browning is supremely reasonable. His imagination, vivid, living, creative as it is, is concrete and rational. It reveals to us more about things of which we already know, or may know, much. With the possible exception of *Childe Roland*, Browning's poetry neither tells nor hints at the things that lie along old Thomas the Rhymer's third and 'bonny' road—the one that was neither the broad highway of this-worldliness nor the steep and narrow path to realms of pure spirit, but a little pathway that 'winds about the ferny brae' to a country beyond surmise. Browning had a more vigorous intellect and more catholic interests than Tennyson, but less enchantment. It was not he who heard either the 'horns of elfland' or that answer 'in a tongue no man could understand' at the close of the terrible *Vision of Sin*.

Browning was a great poet, but not a 'pure' poet. His sense of the fullness and richness of life and his urge to express it drew him to all the arts—to painting and music, as well as to poetry. Though he was a magnificent artist in verse, with a big range, it is questionable whether in a later age, which has developed the scope of the novel to express the within as well as the without of the human drama, and has lifted some taboos, he would not have used that form for much of his work. Although he delighted in dramatic actions and situations, he was probably too concerned with man's inner commentary in the living of them to have expressed himself principally as a dramatist, except perhaps in the Elizabethan age.

So much has been made of Browning's oddities and mannerisms as a writer, and they are indeed so pronounced, that his power, originality, and variety as an artist in words is not always sufficiently recognized. His vocabulary is enormous, and he refused utterly to be bound by earlier conventions as to 'poetic diction.' He wrote idiomatically and racily, delighting often in odd words for their own sake, enjoying the grotesque rhyme or rhythm, but often with a painter-like sense of the tactile values of words. His best effects in this medium are very fine, but sometimes his verse is like dashing *impasto*, seen at too close range. He enriched and sometimes overloaded his poems with illustrations and references from his very wide reading; for like Kipling, though for the most part on a higher mental plane, it entranced him to know and, as it were, dress up in and handle the customs, crafts, and beliefs of many peoples and periods. The tendency to obscure reference—obscure to all but the most widely read or most lucky reader—accounts for part of the 'difficulty' of his work. It reappears in some modern poets, notably T. S. Eliot (though it must not, of course, be confused with purely *private* associative references which Browning did not use).

Browning's verse-forms and metres, varied, original, and often most happy, seem, unlike his play with odd words and rhymes, to arise wholly from the poetic impulse behind the particular poem, and not from any craftsman's desire for sheer experiment with his medium. They are as unconscious, in effect, as some of his other mannerisms are self-conscious. In this aspect of his verse his musical sense is apparent, and can be felt in long poems, as well as in lyrics. *Fifine at the Fair* is like a symphony, where wavelets are carried upon big inrolling waves, and the great rollers themselves obey the long set of the tide.

In actual word sequence and phrasing Browning can be musical, and even mellifluous; but a compressed, telegraphic, and staccato utterance, often carried to great



excess, is so characteristic of him, and is employed at times with such irritating complacency in his own idiosyncrasy, that a restless and breathless movement leaps to the mind at the very name of Robert Browning. These qualities correspond to something in the very expression of his thought, which at its worst is too excited, too insistent. It obtrudes the speaker, allows too little to the intelligence of the hearer, selects too little, pursues side-issues to exhaustion, emphasizes jests with a dig in the ribs, gives the reader ultimately a sense that he is not being allowed to get a thought of his own in edgeways! The obscurities of which his own day complained were due to Browning's habits, good and bad, of expression rather than to difficulties of thought or feeling. In mind and heart he was keen, vital, keen-sighted, and deep-sighted, but never intangible, abstruse or, in a rational sense, complex.

Browning never expressed his mind and heart more completely than in *The Ring and the Book*—a huge internal drama, based on an ancient police-court tragedy, and expressed with amazing insight into human nature and mastery of period setting through the 'confessions' of all the persons involved. It was conceived before his wife's death, and with *Dramatis Personae* it occupied the four years of readjustment to life which followed. It closes a period. But Browning had twenty more years of vigorous creative life, a time of huge output, of some manneristic exaggerations, but of much work that was equal to his best, reflecting new and maturing response to experience. In later years his intellectual curiosity and naturally combative spirit did not abate; yet a certain acquiescence, a part of the truly 'creaturely' attitude so finely expounded by von Hügel as part of essential Christianity, and certainly foreign both to the scientific materialism of the nineteenth century and to the philosophic nihilism of the twentieth, grew in him, fostering an acceptance of the limits set to man's pursuit of truth and goodness, and an increasing reliance on the instincts of the heart.

Browning, however, was still under sixty when he turned from the troubled Italian Renaissance age, excited and bewildered between a dying medievalism, a revival of Hellenism, and the dawn of the new rationalistic empiricism, to steep himself again in the spirit of Greek culture. Two great poems resulted, *Balaustion's Adventure* (1871) and *Aristophanes' Apology, being the Last Adventure of Balaustion* (1875). The scheme of the first is this. Following a passage in Plutarch, Browning takes for heroine a Greek girl, Balaustion, a native of Rhodes, who after the defeat of the Greek navy under Nikias, refused to follow the populace in deserting the sinking star of Athens for the rising and

brutal power of Sparta, fled by sea with others like-minded, and found favour with the Syracusans by 'singing the songs of Euripides.' Browning imagines that Balaustion is telling her tale in after years and puts into the mouth of a young girl burning with passion for the highest poetic and cultural ideas of her race as embodied in the works of Euripides, a 'transcript,' or English version of the *Alkestis*, with a commentary which is at once Balaustion's and Browning's own. The setting of this transcript is full of the movement of ships, the colour of Greek seas, the light of Greek skies, the scent of her stony yet exquisitely prolific islands. It holds a noble picture of intellectual passion in woman. The themes involved in the 'transcript' and commentary themselves are too manifold for treatment here. Browning does not convey the Greek spirit unmodified and untouched, yet he grandly conveys it, and in the *Alkestis* legend of the interwoven lives of mortals and gods, of man torn between his passions and the absolute imperatives, this spirit lends something of its own serenity and lucidity though little of its fatalism to the movement of Browning's mind and verse.

In *Aristophanes' Apology*, Balaustion, now a wife and a mature woman, speaks again when Athens, 'life and light of the whole world,' lies under the heel of Sparta. For many years Balaustion has been the friend of her girlhood's idol, Euripides. She sees the justice of the gods in the downfall of Athens, which has preferred the comedy of Aristophanes to the high things proclaimed by Euripides. On the very night that news comes of the death of Euripides Balaustion meets Aristophanes with his crowd of boon companions. There is controversy between them, and Browning puts into the mouth of Aristophanes a magnificent defence of the comedian's view of life and art. The poem is a grand exposition of the rival meanings and greatneses of tragedy and comedy, of the yea-saying and aspiring spirit, and of the nay-saying and critical one. Again the themes are too vast to be touched in this introduction. In the course of the debate Balaustion reads the *Herakles* in a splendid rendering into English verse which is more strictly a translation than the 'transcript' of the *Alkestis*.

Greek inspiration is to be found also in some shorter poems, of which notable inclusions in this volume are the lovely *Pan and Luna* of *Dramatic Idylls* (1879), which is brimful of sensuous beauty of image, word, and melody of line as Browning puzzles over the meaning of the Virgilian legend of the rape of the Moon-goddess by Pan; and *Pheidippides* (1879), a grand poem of vigorous movement, very close to the spirit of Greek heroism. *Ixion* (from *Jocoseria*, 1883) has for its timeless theme the crucifixion man suffers when his spirit outgrows his contem-

poraries', or even his own, set and formalized conceptions of moral obligation, and when he can serve God only in rebellion against God:

*Out of the wreck I rise—past Zeus to the Potency o'er him.*

Between 1871 and 1875 Browning published four long casuistical poems of great psychological and general interest, *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau*, *Saviour of Society*, *Fifine at the Fair*, *Red-cotton Night-cap Country*, and *The Inn Album*, of which the first two, which are in the form of the dramatic monologue, are given here.

*Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau* (as Browning named his conception of the Emperor Napoleon III) is of special interest to-day, as it is an attempt to reveal the mind of the second of the modern demagogic dictators—tyrants democratically elected and acclaimed by a people which has put its powers into their hands. This poem, which represents the 'Prince' (with his known preference for shady and shabby society) as opening his heart in a Leicester Square café to a chance-met Leicester Square lady, is an outstanding example of Browning's ability to make a case for a man for whose fundamental standpoint he has little sympathy and less taste, yet for whom he finds much to be said, and even something to admire. His Prince (like the Emperor), is an opportunist *conservative* dictator, who conceives it his duty as well as his interest to preserve a tottering social edifice. He suppresses liberty in the interest of the economic security of the masses; but he is against the (at that time) overblown militarism of the French nation, and does not wish to take the further step of using his despotism for military adventures. There are points of great intellectual interest in this work, and a few passages of poetic beauty: but in the main one feels that the theme might have been handled in prose.

*Fifine at the Fair* is another matter. It treats themes of profound and universal interest, but it is fully a poem, and is one of the grandest, most diverse, yet most unified and imaginative of Browning's works. It was much misunderstood in Browning's own time, and Mrs Orr actually apologizes for it as 'a piece of perplexing cynicism.' The speaker of the monologue is 'Don Juan,' his audience is his wife, Elvire, and his theme, or text, is his delight in the beautiful gipsy, Fifine, whom he sees dancing at the fair at Pornic, in Brittany.

The poem passes from the village fair-ground on the Breton shore to the music and glittering sophistication of carnival in Venice, from the fair body and sordid surround of the gipsy Fifine to the Ideas of Plato. It moves like music itself, and clings close to the contours of life.

Edward Dowden, in his *Life of Robert Browning*, writes that 'no more unhappy misnomer than this "Don Juan" could have been devised for the curious, ingenious, learned experimenter in life, no man of pleasure in the vulgar sense of the word, but a deliberate explorer of thoughts and things, who argues his case with so much fine casuistry and often with the justest conceptions of man's character and conduct.' The criticism is valid up to a point, but it is well to remember that Browning himself named his hero Don Juan. The grand theme of the poem is the tension between the forces of stability, or fidelity and of adventure, or 'infidelity' inherent in the living, changing, dynamic man's relation to woman, to art, and to life itself. Browning makes it clear enough that he is no advocate of a slack and sentimental Bohemianism. 'The speaker,' says Dowden, 'is far more a seeker for knowledge than he is a lover.' Yet knowledge for Browning was no dry-as-dust thing, and knowledge, experience, love, cannot be kept in watertight compartments. The poem debates and does not wholly settle the problems involved. At its close love between man and woman in its most absolute sense, between man and wife, between Juan and Elvire (between Robert and Elizabeth?) is vindicated as the sure and everlasting thing. "I end with—Love is all and Death is nought," quoth She' is the last line of the Epilogue. But is it therefore utterly fenced and exclusive? The poem, like others included in this volume, *Bifurcation*, for instance, and *St Martin's Summer*, perhaps reflect without revealing ('please you, no foot over threshold of mine!') the personal problem of a man full of vigour, sympathy, and 'nature,' who had many dear friendships with women, to whom their quality meant much, and whose most beloved woman (like the speaker in *Any Wife to Any Husband*) was long cut off from sight, touch, or renewing interchange, however near in spirit, by death.

On the more abstract side, however, a clearer indication of a solution is given. Love, whether for a person, for an art, for beauty, or for knowledge, is a man's only real possession, his one direct apprehension and deepest experience. It is Elvire, his wife. Fifine, the glittering gipsy, stands for the play of man's intellectual systems and theories, his attempts to account for experience. Fifine is inevitably pursued, and rightly. She can, however, be held only for a time, and is ultimately changing and illusory. If a man chooses her only, in all her manifestations, he will be a beggar at the last, for not a 'Fair-ful of Fifies' will ever add up to the one God-linking experience of true love itself.

*Pacchiarotto*, name poem of a volume published in 1876,



is a *bravura* piece on the theme of the artist who is not content with his craft, but must set the world to rights all at once. It is full of Browning's virtues and vices in riotous mood. Chesterton calls it 'perhaps his most preposterously individual work . . . a romp.' Its rhymes are often frantic! In spite of its quality some readers will find irritating the poet's evident satisfaction with his own often clumsy verbal jokes—his conviction that the audience *must* enjoy it all as much as he does. In the same volume Browning in militant mood on the subject of the artist's right to privacy as far as his life is concerned, will be found in *At the Mermaid, House, and Shop*.

The sudden death on a shared mountain holiday near Lake Geneva of a woman friend very dear to him, was the occasion of a long poem, *La Saisiaz*, a meditation on personal immortality, written with a long, smooth, gently flowing line. It has less than the usual Browning fire and fight, but is valuable as a revelation of Browning's mind on a subject that meant very much to him, and of his heart in a mood tinged with melancholy to which he seldom gave expression.

*Dramatic Idylls* (1879, 1880) are, with certain exceptions, realistic short stories in verse—themes which might have been expressed in prose fiction. As poems they vary greatly in worth. Of the exceptions (mentioned above) to the general tenor of the volume this selection contains two—*Pheidippides* and *Pan and Luna*. Of the short stories two, *Halbert and Hob* and *Ned Bratts*, are striking for their entirely serious and unpatronizing treatment of the movements of mind and spirit in rough, uncultured folk. The latter, which is included in this selection, describes in his own words, with a racy sense of period and social atmosphere, and with a breadth of humour which does not detract from the central tragedy, the conversion, mystical vision, and self-immolation of a brutish innkeeper and his poor sluttish wife under the influence of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. The ancestry of Masefield's *Everlasting Mercy* and other poems may be found here.

Out of *Jocoseria* (1883) the best work is *Ixion*, and the famous lyric, 'Never the time and the place——.' *Jochanan Hakkadosh* is interesting for its knowledge of Hebrew thought and literature, and for its theme of the riddle of the purpose of life and experience, but it is intensely long-winded, and has been omitted from this selection. The same theme recurs in *Ferishtah's Fancies* (1884), which is charming for its oriental turns and trappings, but hardly adds to the body of Browning's thought; this too has been omitted. It contains, however, some attractive characteristic lyrics and an unusual moment of misgiving as to the



hope of immortality beyond this life which was one of Browning's firmest holds:

Only, at heart's utmost joy and triumph, terror  
 Sudden turns the blood to ice: a chill wind disencharms  
 All the late enchantment! What if all be error—  
 If the halo irised round my head were, Love, thine arms?

*Parleyings with Certain People of Importance in Their Day* (1887) still shows no sign of mental decline in the poet, now an old man. The 'parleyings' are really critical essays in verse—discussions on abstract themes with people chosen in part from Browning's love of the slightly obscure, the byways of history; partly because such figures gave him freedom of imaginative interpretation; partly, perhaps, because his love of life made him enjoy rescuing their names from the dust of oblivion. Of these poems, *Christopher Smart* has been selected on account of the revived interest to-day in this strange and once neglected poet, and on account of the perennial attraction of the theme, which is that of the purposes of poetry, and indeed of art as a whole, illustrated by the contrast between the singer, Christopher Smart, and the instructive and didactic versifiers of the Age of Reason in which he lived.

*Asolando, Fancies and Facts*, was the last volume prepared for the press by Browning, and it was published on the day of his death. Its contents are mainly lyrical, and a large selection from it is given here. It is full of mental energy, and of a response to life which sometimes takes the form of intense reminiscence.

A lovely lyricism, astonishing in so old a poet, is now recaptured after the sheer thinking of much of the work just preceding it. Once again, and for the last time, Browning sings his great theme, the love of woman, with a heart full of praise and the memory of the passion of the blood. Here and there is a faint note of sentimentalism (not unknown though negligible in the earlier Browning); more often there is a pinch of humour's salt; most often a true response of the poet's whole generous nature to the impulse that 'rules the sun and other stars.' *Rephan, Reverie*, and the *Epilogue* together form a fitting valediction from the poet of *Rabbi ben Ezra*. In the lines of the last there is something of the pathos of weariness—the old fighter holds his head up gallantly, but with a sense of strain. The long march, the long fight, were nearly ended: rest and the Unseen were near.

M. M. BOZMAN.

## NOTE ON VOLUMES IV AND V:

These volumes contain a selection of Browning's later poems. Four of the longer poems have been omitted, viz. *Red-cotton Night-cap Country*, 1873; *The Inn Album*, 1875; *The Agamemnon of Aeschylus*, 1877; *The Two Ports of Croisic*, 1878. The collections of shorter poems and lyrics are all represented, and four poems not included in previous editions of the Everyman Browning have been added in an Appendix in Volume V.

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# BALAUSTION'S ADVENTURE

INCLUDING

A TRANSCRIPT FROM EURIPIDES

1871

TO THE COUNTESS COWPER

*If I mention the simple truth : that this poem absolutely owes its existence to you,—who not only suggested, but imposed on me as a task, what has proved the most delightful of May-month amusements—I shall seem honest, indeed, but hardly prudent, for, how good and beautiful ought such a poem to be !*

*Euripides might fear little ; but I, also, have an interest in the performance ; and what wonder if I beg you to suffer that it make, in another and far easier sense, its nearest possible approach to those Greek qualities of goodness and beauty, by laying itself gratefully at your feet ?*

R. B.

LONDON: July 23, 1871.

ABOUT that strangest, saddest, sweetest song  
I, when a girl, heard in Kameiros once,  
And, after, saved my life by? Oh, so glad  
To tell you the adventure!

Petalé,

Phullis, Charopé, Chrusion! You must know,  
This 'after' fell in that unhappy time  
When poor reluctant Nikias, pushed by fate  
Went falteringly against Syracuse;  
And there shamed Athens, lost her ships and men,  
And gained a grave, or death without a grave.  
I was at Rhodes—the isle, not Rhodes the town,  
Mine was Kameiros—when the news arrived:  
Our people rose in tumult, cried 'No more  
Duty to Athens, let us join the League  
And side with Sparta, share the spoil,—at worst,  
Abjure a headship that will ruin Greece!'

And so, they sent to Knidos for a fleet  
To come and help revolvers. Ere help came,—  
Girl as I was, and never out of Rhodes  
The whole of my first fourteen years of life,  
But nourished with Ilissian mother's-milk,—  
I passionately cried to who would hear  
And those who loved me at Kameiros—'No!  
Never throw Athens off for Sparta's sake—  
Never disloyal to the life and light  
Of the whole world worth calling world at all!  
Rather go die at Athens, lie outstretched  
For feet to trample on, before the gate  
Of Diomedes or the Hippadai,  
Before the temples and among the tombs,  
Than tolerate the grim felicity  
Of harsh Lakonia! Ours the fasts and feasts,  
Choës and Chutroi; ours the sacred grove,  
Agora, Dikasteria, Poikilé,  
Pnux, Keramikos; Salamis in sight,  
Psuttalia, Marathon itself, not far!  
Ours the great Dionusiak theatre,  
And tragic triad of immortal fames,  
Aischulos, Sophokles, Euripides!  
To Athens, all of us that have a soul,  
Follow me!' And I wrought so with my prayer,  
That certain of my kinsfolk crossed the strait  
And found a ship at Kaunos; well-disposed  
Because the Captain—where did he draw breath  
First but within Psuttalia? Thither fled  
A few like-minded as ourselves. We turned  
The glad prow westward, soon were out at sea,  
Pushing, brave ship with the vermilion cheek,  
Proud for our heart's true harbour. But a wind  
Lay ambushed by Point Malea of bad fame,  
And leapt out, bent us from our course. Next day  
Broke stormless, so broke next blue day and next.  
'But whither bound in this white waste?' we plagued  
The pilot's old experience: 'Cos or Crete?'  
Because he promised us the land ahead.  
While we strained eyes to share in what he saw,  
The Captain's shout startled us; round we rushed:  
What hung behind us but a pirate-ship  
Panting for the good prize! 'Row! harder row!

Row for dear life!' the Captain cried: 'tis Crete,  
Friendly Crete looming large there! Beat this craft  
That 's but a keles, one-benched pirate-bark,  
Lokrian, or that bad breed off Thessaly!  
Only, so cruel are such water-thieves,  
No man of you, no woman, child, or slave,  
But falls their prey, once let them board our boat!'—  
So, furiously our oarsmen rowed and rowed;  
And when the oars flagged somewhat, dash and dip,  
As we approached the coast and safety, so  
That we could hear behind us plain the threats  
And curses of the pirate panting up  
In one more throe and passion of pursuit,—  
Seeing our oars flag in the rise and fall,  
I sprang upon the altar by the mast  
And sang aloft,—some genius prompting me,  
That song of ours which saved at Salamis:  
'O sons of Greeks, go, set your country free,  
Free your wives, free your children, free the fanes  
O' the Gods, your fathers founded,—sepulchres  
They sleep in! Or save all, or all be lost!'  
Then, in a frenzy, so the noble oars  
Churned the black water white, that well away  
We drew, soon saw land rise, saw hills grow up,  
Saw spread itself a sea-wide town with towers,  
Not fifty stadia distant; and, betwixt  
A large bay and a small, the islet-bar,  
Even Ortugia's self—oh, luckless we!  
For here was Sicily and Syracuse:  
We ran upon the lion from the wolf.  
Ere we drew breath, took counsel, out there came  
A galley, hailed us. 'Who asks entry here  
In war-time? Are you Sparta's friend or foe?'  
'Kaunians'—our Captain judged his best reply,  
'The mainland-seaport that belongs to Rhodes;  
Rhodes that casts in her lot now with the League,  
Forsaking Athens,—you have heard belike!'  
'Ay, but we heard all Athens in one ode  
Just now! we heard her in that Aischulos!  
You bring a boatful of Athenians here,  
Kaunians although you be: and prudence bids,  
For Kaunos' sake, why, carry them unhurt  
To Kaunos, if you will: for Athens' sake,

Back must you, though ten pirates blocked the bay!  
 We want no colony from Athens here,  
 With memories of Salamis, forsooth,  
 To spirit up our captives, that pale crowd  
 I' the quarry, whom the daily pint of corn  
 Keeps in good order and submissiveness.  
 Then the grey Captain prayed them by the Gods,  
 And by their own knees, and their fathers' beards,  
 They should not wickedly thrust suppliants back,  
 But save the innocent on traffic bound—  
 Or, may be, some Athenian family  
 Perishing of desire to die at home,—  
 From that vile foe still lying on its oars,  
 Waiting the issue in the distance. Vain!  
 Words to the wind! And we were just about  
 To turn and face the foe, as some tired bird  
 Barbarians pelt at, drive with shouts away  
 From shelter in what rocks, however rude,  
 She makes for, to escape the kindled eye,  
 Split beak, crook'd claw o' the creature, cormorant  
 Or ossifrage, that, hardly baffled, hangs  
 Afloat i' the foam, to take her if she turn.  
 So were we at destruction's very edge,  
 When those o' the galley, as they had discussed  
 A point, a question raised by somebody,  
 A matter mooted in a moment,—'Wait!  
 Cried they (and wait we did, you may be sure).  
 'That song was veritable Aischulos,  
 Familiar to the mouth of man and boy,  
 Old glory: how about Euripides?  
 The newer and not yet so famous bard,  
 He that was born upon the battle-day  
 While that song and the salpinx sounded him  
 Into the world, first sound, at Salamis—  
 Might you know any of his verses too?'

Now, someone of the Gods inspired this speech:  
 Since ourselves knew what happened but last year—  
 How, when Gulippos gained his victory  
 Over poor Nikias, poor Demosthenes,  
 And Syracuse condemned the conquered force  
 To dig and starve i' the quarry, branded them—  
 Freeborn Athenians, brute-like in the front

With horse-head brands,—ah, 'Region of the Steed'!—  
Of all these men immersed in misery,  
It was found none had been advantaged so  
By aught in the past life he used to prize  
And pride himself concerning,—no rich man  
By riches, no wise man by wisdom, no  
Wiser man still (as who loved more the Muse)  
By storing, at brain's edge and tip of tongue,  
Old glory, great plays that had long ago  
Made themselves wings to fly about the world,—  
Not one such man was helped so at his need  
As certain few that (wisest they of all!)  
Had, at first summons, oped heart, flung door wide  
At the new knocking of Euripides,  
Nor drawn the bolt with who cried 'Decadence!  
And, after Sophokles, be nature dumb!'—  
Such,—and I see in it God Bacchos' boon  
To souls that recognized his latest child,  
He who himself, born latest of the Gods,  
Was stoutly held impostor by mankind,—  
Such were in safety: any who could speak  
A chorus to the end, or prologize,  
Roll out a rhesis, wield some golden length  
Stiffened by wisdom out into a line,  
Or thrust and parry in bright monostich,  
Teaching Euripides to Syracuse—  
Any such happy man had prompt reward:  
If he lay bleeding on the battle-field  
They staunched his wounds and gave him drink and food,  
If he were slave i' the house, for reverence  
They rose up, bowed to who proved master now,  
And bade him go free, thank Euripides!  
Ay, and such did so: many such, he said,  
Returning home to Athens, sought him out,  
The old bard in the solitary house,  
And thanked him ere they went to sacrifice.  
I say, we knew that story of last year!

Therefore, at mention of Euripides,  
The Captain crowed out 'Euoi, praise the God!  
Oöp, boys, bring our owl-shield to the fore!  
Out with our Sacred Anchor! Here she stands,  
Balaustion! Strangers, greet the lyric girl!

Euripides? Babai! what a word there 'scaped  
 Your teeth's enclosure, quoth my grandsire's song!  
 Why, fast as snow in Thrace, the voyage through,  
 Has she been falling thick in flakes of him!  
 Frequent as figs at Kaunos, Kaunians said.  
 Balaustion, stand forth and confirm my speech!  
 Now it was some whole passion of a play;  
 Now, peradventure, but a honey-drop  
 That slipt its comb i' the chorus. If there rose  
 A star, before I could determine steer  
 Southward or northward—if a cloud surprised  
 Heaven, ere I fairly hollaed 'Furl the sail!—'  
 She had at fingers' end both cloud and star;  
 Some thought that perched there, tame and tuneable,  
 Fitted with wings; and still, as off it flew,  
 'So sang Euripides,' she said, 'so sang  
 The meteoric poet of air and sea,  
 Planets and the pale populace of heaven,  
 The mind of man, and all that 's made to soar!'  
 And so, although she has some other name,  
 We only call her Wild-pomegranate-flower,  
 Balaustion; since, where'er the red bloom burns  
 I' the dull dark verdure of the bounteous tree,  
 Dethroning, in the Rosy Isle, the rose,  
 You shall find food, drink, odour, all at once;  
 Cool leaves to bind about an aching brow,  
 And, never much away, the nightingale.  
 Sing them a strophe, with the turn-again,  
 Down to the verse that ends all, proverb-like,  
 And save us, thou Balaustion, bless the name!'

But I cried 'Brother Greek! better than so,—  
 Save us, and I have courage to recite  
 The main of a whole play from first to last;  
 That strangest, saddest, sweetest song of his,  
 ALKESTIS; which was taught, long years ago  
 At Athens, in Glaukinos' archonship,  
 But only this year reached our Isle o' the Rose.  
 I saw it, at Kameiros, played the same,  
 They say, as for the right Lenean feast  
 In Athens; and beside the perfect piece—  
 Its beauty and the way it makes you weep,—  
 There is much honour done your own loved God



Herakles, whom you house i' the city here  
Nobly, the Temple wide Greece talks about!  
I come a suppliant to your Herakles!  
Take me and put me on his temple-steps  
To tell you his achievement as I may,  
And, that told, he shall bid you set us free!

Then, because Greeks are Greeks, and hearts are hearts,  
And poetry is power,—they all outbroke  
In a great joyous laughter with much love:  
'Thank Herakles for the good holiday!  
Make for the harbour! Row, and let voice ring,  
"In we row, bringing more Euripides!"'  
All the crowd, as they lined the harbour now,  
'More of Euripides!'—took up the cry.  
We landed; the whole city, soon astir,  
Came rushing out of gates in common joy  
To the suburb temple; there they stationed me  
O' the topmost step: and plain I told the play,  
Just as I saw it; what the actors said,  
And what I saw, or thought I saw the while,  
At our Kameiros theatre, clean-scooped  
Out of a hill-side, with the sky above  
And sea before our seats in marble row:  
Told it, and, two days more, repeated it,  
Until they sent us on our way again  
With good words and great wishes.

Oh, for me—

A wealthy Syracusan brought a whole  
Talent and bade me take it for myself:  
I left it on the tripod in the fane,  
—For had not Herakles a second time  
Wrestled with Death and saved devoted ones?—  
Thank-offering to the hero. And a band  
Of captives, whom their lords grew kinder to  
Because they called the poet countryman,  
Sent me a crown of wild-pomegranate-flower:  
So, I shall live and die Balaustion now.  
But one—one man—one youth,—three days, each day,—  
(If, ere I lifted up my voice to speak,  
I gave a downward glance by accident)  
Was found at foot o' the temple. When we sailed,  
There, in the ship too, was he found as well,

Having a hunger to see Athens too.  
 We reached Peiraeus; when I landed—lo,  
 He was beside me. Anthesterion-month  
 Is just commencing: when its moon rounds full,  
 We are to marry. O Euripides!

I saw the master: when we found ourselves  
 (Because the young man needs must follow me)  
 Firm on Peiraeus, I demanded first  
 Whither to go and find him. Would you think?  
 The story how he saved us made some smile:  
 They wondered strangers were exorbitant  
 In estimation of Euripides.  
 He was not Aischulos nor Sophokles:  
 —‘Then, of our younger bards who boast the bay,  
 Had I sought Agathon, or Iophon,  
 Or, what now had it been Kephisophon?  
 A man that never kept good company,  
 The most unsociable of poet-kind,  
 All beard that was not freckle in his face!’

I soon was at the tragic house, and saw  
 The master, held the sacred hand of him  
 And laid it to my lips. Men love him not:  
 How should they? Nor do they much love his friend  
 Sokrates: but those two have fellowship:  
 Sokrates often comes to hear him read,  
 And never misses if he teach a piece.  
 Both, being old, will soon have company,  
 Sit with their peers above the talk. Meantime,  
 He lives as should a statue in its niche;  
 Cold walls enclose him, mostly darkness there,  
 Alone, unless some foreigner uncouth  
 Breaks in, sits, stares an hour, and so departs.  
 Brain-stuffed with something to sustain his life,  
 Dry to the marrow mid much merchandise.  
 How should such know and love the man?

Why, mark!

Even when I told the play and got the praise,  
 There spoke up a brisk little somebody,  
 Critic and whippersnapper, in a rage  
 To set things right: ‘The girl departs from truth!  
 Pretends she saw what was not to be seen,



Making the mask of the actor move, forsooth!  
"Then a fear flitted o'er the wife's white face,"—  
"Then frowned the father,"—"then the husband  
shook,"—  
"Then from the festal forehead slipt each spray,  
"And the heroic mouth's gay grace was gone;"—  
As she had seen each naked fleshly face,  
And not the merely-painted mask it wore!  
Well, is the explanation difficult?  
What 's poetry except a power that makes?  
And, speaking to one sense, inspires the rest,  
Pressing them all into its service; so  
That who sees painting, seems to hear as well  
The speech that 's proper for the painted mouth;  
And who hears music, feels his solitude  
Peopled at once—for how count heart-beats plain  
Unless a company, with hearts which beat,  
Come close to the musician, seen or no?  
And who receives true verse at eye or ear,  
Takes in (with verse) time, place, and person too,  
So, links each sense on to its sister-sense,  
Grace-like: and what if but one sense of three  
Front you at once? The sidelong pair conceive  
Thro' faintest touch of finest finger-tips,—  
Hear, see and feel, in faith's simplicity,  
Alike, what one was sole recipient of:  
Who hears the poem, therefore, sees the play.

Enough and too much! Hear the play itself!  
Under the grape-vines, by the streamlet-side,  
Close to Baccheion; till the cool increase,  
And other stars steal on the evening-star,  
And so, we homeward flock i' the dusk, we five!  
You will expect, no one of all the words  
O' the play but is grown part now of my soul,  
Since the adventure. 'T is the poet speaks:  
But if I, too, should try and speak at times,  
Leading your love to where my love, perchance,  
Climbed earlier, found a nest before you knew—  
Why, bear with the poor climber, for love's sake!  
Look at Baccheion's beauty opposite,  
The temple with the pillars at the porch!  
See you not something beside masonry?

What if my words wind in and out the stone  
As yonder ivy, the God's parasite?  
Though they leap all the way the pillar leads,  
Festoon about the marble, foot to frieze,  
And serpentiningly enrich the roof,  
Toy with some few bees and a bird or two,—  
What then? The column holds the cornice up.

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There slept a silent palace in the sun,  
With plains adjacent and Thessalian peace—  
Pherai, where King Admetos ruled the land.

Out from the portico there gleamed a God,  
Apollon: for the bow was in his hand,  
The quiver at his shoulder, all his shape  
One dreadful beauty. And he hailed the house  
As if he knew it well and loved it much:  
'O Admeteian domes, where I endured,  
Even the God I am, to drudge awhile,  
Do righteous penance for a reckless deed,  
Accepting the slaves' table thankfully!'  
Then told how Zeus had been the cause of all,  
Raising the wrath in him which took revenge  
And slew those forgers of the thunderbolt  
Wherewith Zeus blazed the life from out the breast  
Of Phoibos' son Asklepios (I surmise,  
Because he brought the dead to life again)  
And so, for punishment, must needs go slave,  
God as he was, with a mere mortal lord:  
—Told how he came to King Admetos' land,  
And played the ministrant, was herdsman there,  
Warding all harm away from him and his  
Till now; 'For, holy as I am,' said he,  
'The lord I chanced upon was holy too:  
Whence I deceived the Moirai, drew from death  
My master, this same son of Pheres,—ay,  
The Goddesses conceded him escape  
From Hades, when the fated day should fall,  
Could he exchange lives, find some friendly one  
Ready, for his sake, to content the grave.  
But trying all in turn, the friendly list,  
Why, he found no one, none who loved so much,

Nor father, nor the aged mother's self  
That bore him, no, not any save his wife,  
Willing to die instead of him and watch  
Never a sunrise nor a sunset more:  
And she is even now within the house,  
Upborne by pitying hands, the feeble frame  
Gasping its last of life out; since to-day  
Destiny is accomplished, and she dies,  
And I, lest here pollution light on me,  
Leave, as ye witness, all my wonted joy  
In this dear dwelling. Ay,—for here comes Death  
Close on us of a sudden! who, pale priest  
Of the mute people, means to bear his prey  
To the house of Hades. The symmetric step!  
How he treads true to time and place and thing,  
Dogging day, hour and minute, for death's-due!

And we observed another Deity,  
Half in, half out the portal,—watch and ward,—  
Eyeing his fellow: formidably fixed,  
Yet faltering too at who affronted him,  
As somehow disadvantaged, should they strive.  
Like some dread heapy blackness, ruffled wing,  
Convulsed and cowering head that is all eye,  
Which proves a ruined eagle who, too blind  
Swooping in quest o' the quarry, fawn or kid,  
Descried deep down the chasm 'twixt rock and rock,  
Has wedged and mortised, into either wall  
O' the mountain, the pent earthquake of his power;  
So lies, half hurtless yet still terrible,  
Just when—who stalks up, who stands front to front,  
But the great lion-guarder of the gorge,  
Lord of the ground, a stationed glory there?  
Yet he too pauses ere he try the worst  
O' the frightful unfamiliar nature, new  
To the chasm, indeed, but elsewhere known enough,  
Among the shadows and the silences  
Above i' the sky: so each antagonist  
Silently faced his fellow and forbore.  
Till Death shrilled, hard and quick, in spite and fear:

'Ha, ha, and what mayst thou do at the domes,  
Why hauntest here, thou Phoibos? Here again

At the old injustice, limiting our rights,  
Baulking of honour due us Gods o' the grave?  
Was 't not enough for thee to have delayed  
Death from Admetos,—why thy crafty art  
Cheating the very Fates,—but thou must arm  
The bow-hand and take station, press 'twixt me  
And Pelias' daughter, who then saved her spouse,—  
Did just that, now thou comest to undo,—  
Taking his place to die, Alkestis here?'

But the God sighed 'Have courage! All my arms,  
This time, are simple justice and fair words.'

Then each plied each with rapid interchange:

'What need of bow, were justice arms enough?'

'Ever it is my wont to bear the bow.'

'Ay, and with bow, not justice, help this house!'

'I help it, since a friend's woe weighs me too.'

'And now,—wilt force from me this second corpse?'

'By force I took no corpse at first from thee.'

'How then is he above ground, not beneath?'

'He gave his wife instead of him, thy prey.'

'And prey, this time at least, I bear below!'

'Go take her!—for I doubt persuading thee. . . .'

'To kill the doomed one? What my function else?'

'No! Rather, to despatch the true mature.'

'Truly I take thy meaning, see thy drift!'

'Is there a way then she may reach old age?'

- 'No way! I glad me in my honours too!'
- 'But, young or old, thou tak'st one life, no more!'
- 'Younger they die, greater my praise redounds!'
- 'If she die old,—the sumptuous funeral!'
- 'Thou layest down a law the rich would like.'
- 'How so? Did wit lurk there and 'scape thy sense?'
- 'Who could buy substitutes would die old men.'
- 'It seems thou wilt not grant me, then, this grace?'
- 'This grace I will not grant: thou know'st my ways.'
- 'Ways harsh to men, hateful to Gods, at least!'
- 'All things thou canst not have: my rights for me!'

And then Apollon prophesied,—I think,  
More to himself than to impatient Death,  
Who did not hear or would not heed the while,—  
For he went on to say 'Yet even so,  
Cruel above the measure, thou shalt clutch  
No life here! Such a man do I perceive  
Advancing to the house of Pheres now,  
Sent by Eurustheus to bring out of Thrace,  
The winter world, a chariot with its steeds!  
He indeed, when Admetos proves the host,  
And he the guest, at the house here,—he it is  
Shall bring to bear such force, and from thy hands  
Rescue this woman. Grace no whit to me  
Will that prove, since thou dost thy deed the same,  
And earnest too my hate, and all for nought!'

But how should Death or stay or understand?  
Doubtless, he only felt the hour was come,  
And the sword free; for he but flung some taunt—  
'Having talked much, thou wilt not gain the more!  
This woman, then, descends to Hades' hall

Now that I rush on her, begin the rites  
O' the sword; for sacred, to us Gods below,  
That head whose hair this sword shall sanctify!'

And, in the fire-flash of the appalling sword,  
The uprush and the outburst, the onslaught  
Of Death's portentous passage through the door,  
Apollon stood a pitying moment-space:  
I caught one last gold gaze upon the night  
Nearing the world now: and the God was gone,  
And mortals left to deal with misery,  
As in came stealing slow, now this, now that  
Old sojourner throughout the country-side,  
Servants grown friends to those unhappy here:  
And, cloudlike in their increase, all these griefs  
Broke and began the over-brimming wail,  
Out of a common impulse, word by word.

'What now may mean the silence at the door?  
Why is Admetos' mansion stricken dumb?  
Not one friend near, to say if we should mourn  
Our mistress dead, or if Alkestis lives  
And sees the light still, Pelias' child—to me,  
To all, conspicuously the best of wives  
That ever was toward husband in this world!  
Hears any one or wail beneath the roof,  
Or hands that strike each other, or the groan  
Announcing all is done and nought to dread?  
Still not a servant stationed at the gates!  
O Paian, that thou wouldst dispart the wave  
O' the woe, be present! Yet, had woe o'erwhelmed  
The housemates, they were hardly silent thus:  
It cannot be, the dead is forth and gone.  
Whence comes thy gleam of hope? I dare not hope:  
What is the circumstance that heartens thee?  
How could Admetos have dismissed a wife  
So worthy, unescorted to the grave?  
Before the gates I see no hallowed vase  
Of fountain-water, such as suits death's door;  
Nor any clipt locks strew the vestibule,  
Though surely these drop when we grieve the dead,  
Nor hand sounds smitten against youthful hand,  
The women's way. And yet—the appointed time—



How speak the word?—this day is even the day  
Ordained her for departing from its light.  
O touch calamitous to heart and soul!  
Needs must one, when the good are tortured so,  
Sorrow,—one reckoned faithful from the first.'

Then their souls rose together, and one sigh  
Went up in cadence from the common mouth:  
How 'Vainly—anywhither in the world  
Directing or land-labour or sea-search—  
To Lukia or the sand-waste, Ammon's seat—  
Might you set free their hapless lady's soul  
From the abrupt Fate's footstep instant now  
Not a sheep-sacrificer at the hearths  
Of Gods had they to go to: one there was  
Who, if his eyes saw light still,—Phoibos' son,—  
Had wrought so she might leave the shadowy place  
And Hades' portal; for he propped up Death's  
Subdued ones till the Zeus-flung thunder-flame  
Struck him; and now what hope of life were hailed  
With open arms? For, all the king could do  
Is done already,—not one God whereof  
The altar fails to reek with sacrifice:  
And for assuagement of these evils—nought!'

But here they broke off, for a matron moved  
Forth from the house: and, as her tears flowed fast,  
They gathered round. 'What fortune shall we hear?  
For mourning thus, if aught affect thy lord,  
We pardon thee: but lives the lady yet  
Or has she perished?—that we fain would know!'

'Call her dead, call her living, each style serves,'  
The matron said: 'though grave-ward bowed, she  
breathed;  
Nor knew her husband what the misery meant  
Before he felt it: hope of life was none:  
The appointed day pressed hard; the funeral pomp  
He had prepared too.'

When the friends broke out:  
'Let her in dying know herself at least  
Sole wife, of all the wives 'neath the sun wide,  
For glory and for goodness!—'Ah, how else

Than best? who controverts the claim?' quoth she:  
'What kind of creature should the woman prove  
That has surpassed Alkestis?—surelier shown  
Preference for her husband to herself  
Than by determining to die for him?  
But so much all our city knows indeed:  
Hear what she did indoors and wonder then!  
For, when she felt the crowning day was come,  
She washed with river-waters her white skin,  
And, taking from the cedar closets forth  
Vesture and ornament, bedecked herself  
Nobly, and stood before the hearth, and prayed:  
"Mistress, because I now depart the world,  
Falling before thee the last time, I ask—  
Be mother to my orphans! wed the one  
To a kind wife, and make the other's mate  
Some princely person: nor, as I who bore  
My children perish, suffer that they too  
Die all untimely, but live, happy pair,  
Their full glad life out in the fatherland!"  
And every altar through Admetos' house  
She visited and crowned and prayed before,  
Stripping the myrtle-foliage from the boughs,  
Without a tear, without a groan,—no change  
At all to that skin's nature, fair to see,  
Caused by the imminent evil. But this done—  
Reaching her chamber, falling on her bed,  
There, truly, burst she into tears and spoke:  
"O bride-bed, where I loosened from my life  
Virginity for that same husband's sake  
Because of whom I die now—fare thee well!  
Since nowise do I hate thee: me alone  
Hast thou destroyed; for, shrinking to betray  
Thee and my spouse, I die: but thee, O bed,  
Some other woman shall possess as wife—  
Truer, no! but of better fortune, say!"  
—So falls on, kisses it till all the couch  
Is moistened with the eyes' sad overflow.  
But, when of many tears she had her fill,  
She flings from off the couch, goes headlong forth,  
Yet,—forth the chamber,—still keeps turning back  
And casts her on the couch again once more.  
Her children, clinging to their mother's robe,



Wept meanwhile: but she took them in her arms,  
And, as a dying woman might, embraced  
Now one and now the other: 'neath the roof,  
All of the household servants wept as well,  
Moved to compassion for their mistress; she  
Extended her right hand to all and each,  
And there was no one of such low degree  
She spoke not to nor had an answer from.  
Such are the evils in Admetos' house.  
Dying,—why, he had died; but, living, gains  
Such grief as this he never will forget!

And when they questioned of Admetos, 'Well—  
Holding his dear wife in his hands, he weeps;  
Entreats her not to give him up, and seeks  
The impossible, in fine: for there she wastes  
And withers by disease, abandoned now,  
A mere dead weight upon her husband's arm.  
Yet, none the less, although she breathe so faint,  
Her will is to behold the beams o' the sun:  
Since never more again, but this last once,  
Shall she see sun, its circlet or its ray.  
But I will go, announce your presence,—friends  
Indeed; since 't is not all so love their lords  
As seek them in misfortune, kind the same:  
But you are the old friends I recognize.'

And at the word she turned again to go:  
The while they waited, taking up the plaint  
To Zeus again: 'What passage from this strait?  
What loosing of the heavy fortune fast  
About the palace? Will such help appear,  
Or must we clip the locks and cast around  
Each form already the black peplos' fold?  
Clearly the black robe, clearly! All the same,  
Pray to the Gods!—like Gods' no power so great!  
O thou king Paian, find some way to save!  
Reveal it, yea, reveal it! Since of old  
Thou found'st a cure, why, now again become  
Releaser from the bonds of Death, we beg,  
And give the sanguinary Hades pause!'  
So the song dwindled into a mere moan,  
How dear the wife, and what her husband's woe;

When suddenly—

‘Behold, behold!’ breaks forth:  
 ‘Here is she coming from the house indeed!  
 Her husband comes, too! Cry aloud, lament,  
 Pheraia land, this best of women, bound—  
 So is she withered by disease away—  
 For realms below and their infernal king!  
 Never will we affirm there’s more of joy  
 Than grief in marriage; making estimate  
 Both from old sorrows anciently observed,  
 And this misfortune of the king we see—  
 Admetos who, of bravest spouse bereaved,  
 Will live life’s remnant out, no life at all!’

So wailed they, while a sad procession wound  
 Slow from the innermost o’ the palace, stopped  
 At the extreme verge of the platform-front:  
 There opened, and disclosed Alkestis’ self,  
 The consecrated lady, borne to look  
 Her last—and let the living look their last—  
 She at the sun, we at Alkestis.

We!

For would you note a memorable thing?  
 We grew to see in that severe regard,—  
 Hear in that hard dry pressure to the point,  
 Word slow pursuing word in monotone,—  
 What Death meant when he called her consecrate  
 Henceforth to Hades. I believe, the sword—  
 Its office was to cut the soul at once  
 From life,—from something in this world which hides  
 Truth, and hides falsehood, and so lets us live  
 Somehow. Suppose a rider furls a cloak  
 About a horse’s head; unfrightened, so,  
 Between the menace of a flame, between  
 Solicitation of the pasturage,  
 Untempted equally, he goes his gait  
 To journey’s end: then pluck the pharos off!  
 Show what delusions steadied him i’ the straight  
 O’ the path, made grass seem fire and fire seem grass,  
 All through a little bandage o’er the eyes!  
 As certainly with eyes unbandaged now  
 Alkestis looked upon the action here,  
 Self-immolation for Admetos’ sake;

Saw, with a new sense, all her death would do,  
And which of her survivors had the right,  
And which the less right, to survive thereby.  
For, you shall note, she uttered no one word  
Of love more to her husband, though he wept  
Plenteously, waxed importunate in prayer—  
Folly's old fashion when its seed bears fruit.  
I think she judged that she had bought the ware  
O' the seller at its value,—nor praised him  
Nor blamed herself, but, with indifferent eye,  
Saw him purse money up, prepare to leave  
The buyer with a solitary bale—  
True purple—but in place of all that coin,  
Had made a hundred others happy too,  
If so willed fate or fortune! What remained  
To give away, should rather go to these  
Than one with coin to clink and contemplate.  
Admetos had his share and might depart,  
The rest was for her children and herself.  
(Charopé makes a face: but wait awhile!)  
She saw things plain as Gods do: by one stroke  
O' the sword that rends the life-long veil away.  
(Also Euripides saw plain enough:  
But you and I, Charopé!—you and I  
Will trust his sight until our own grow clear.)

'Sun, and thou light of day, and heavenly dance  
O' the fleet cloud-figure!' (so her passion paused,  
While the awe-stricken husband made his moan,  
Muttered now this now that ineptitude:  
'Sun that sees thee and me, a suffering pair,  
Who did the Gods no wrong whence thou shouldst die!')  
Then, as if caught up, carried in their course,  
Fleeting and free as cloud and sunbeam are,  
She missed no happiness that lay beneath:  
'O thou wide earth, from these my palace roofs,  
To distant nuptial chambers once my own  
In that Iolkos of my ancestry!'—  
There the flight failed her. 'Raise thee, wretched one!  
Give us not up! Pray pity from the Gods!'

Vainly Admetos: for 'I see it—see  
The two-oared boat! The ferryer of the dead,

Charon, hand hard upon the boatman's-pole,  
 Calls me—even now calls—"Why delayest thou?  
 Quick! Thou obstructest all made ready here  
 For prompt departure: quick, then!"

'Woe is me!

A bitter voyage this to undergo,  
 Even i' the telling! Adverse Powers above,  
 How do ye plague us!

Then a shiver ran:

'He has me—seest not?—hales me,—who is it?—  
 To the hall o' the Dead—ah, who but Hades' self,  
 He, with the wings there, glares at me, one gaze  
 All that blue brilliance, under the eyebrow!  
 What wilt thou do? Unhand me! Such a way  
 I have to traverse, all unhappy one!'

'Way—piteous to thy friends, but, most of all,  
 Me and thy children: ours assuredly  
 A common partnership in grief like this!'

Whereat they closed about her; but 'Let be!  
 Leave, let me lie now! Strength forsakes my feet.  
 Hades is here, and shadowy on my eyes  
 Comes the night creeping. Children—children, now  
 Indeed, a mother is no more for you!  
 Farewell, O children, long enjoy the light!'

'Ah me, the melancholy word I hear,  
 Oppressive beyond every kind of death!  
 No, by the Deities, take heart nor dare  
 To give me up—no, by our children too  
 Made orphans of! But rise, be resolute,  
 Since, thou departed, I no more remain!  
 For in thee are we bound up, to exist  
 Or cease to be—so we adore thy love!'

—Which brought out truth to judgment. At this word  
 And protestation, all the truth in her  
 Claimed to assert itself: she waved away  
 The blue-eyed black-wing'd phantom, held in check  
 The advancing pageantry of Hades there,  
 And, with no change in her own countenance,

She fixed her eyes on the protesting man,  
And let her lips unlock their sentence,—so!

‘Admetos,—how things go with me thou seest,—  
I wish to tell thee, ere I die, what things  
I will should follow. I—to honour thee,  
Secure for thee, by my own soul’s exchange,  
Continued looking on the daylight here—  
Die for thee—yet, if so I pleased, might live,  
Nay, wed what man of Thessaly I would,  
And dwell i’ the dome with pomp and queenliness.  
I would not,—would not live bereft of thee,  
With children orphaned, neither shrank at all,  
Though having gifts of youth wherein I joyed.  
Yet, who begot thee and who gave thee birth,  
Both of these gave thee up; no less, a term  
Of life was reached when death became them well,  
Ay, well—to save their child and glorious die:  
Since thou wast all they had, nor hope remained  
Of having other children in thy place.  
So, I and thou had lived out our full time,  
Nor thou, left lonely of thy wife, wouldst groan  
With children reared in orphanage: but thus  
Some God disposed things, willed they so should be.  
Be they so! Now do thou remember this,  
Do me in turn a favour—favour, since  
Certainly I shall never claim my due,  
For nothing is more precious than a life:  
But a fit favour, as thyself wilt say,  
Loving our children here no less than I,  
If head and heart be sound in thee at least.  
Uphold them, make them masters of my house,  
Nor wed and give a step-dame to the pair,  
Who, being a worse wife than I, thro’ spite  
Will raise her hand against both thine and mine  
Never do this at least, I pray to thee!  
For hostile the new-comer, the step-dame,  
To the old brood—a very viper she  
For gentleness! Here stand they, boy and girl;  
The boy has got a father, a defence  
Tower-like, he speaks to and has answer from:  
But thou, my girl, how will thy virginhood  
Conclude itself in marriage fittingly?

Upon what sort of sire-found yoke-fellow  
 Art thou to chance? with all to apprehend—  
 Lest, casting on thee some unkind report,  
 She blast thy nuptials in the bloom of youth.  
 For neither shall thy mother watch thee wed,  
 Nor hearten thee in childbirth, standing by  
 Just when a mother's presence helps the most!  
 No, for I have to die: and this my ill  
 Comes to me, nor to-morrow, no, nor yet  
 The third day of the month, but now, even now,  
 I shall be reckoned among those no more.  
 Farewell, be happy! And to thee, indeed,  
 Husband, the boast remains permissible  
 Thou hadst a wife was worthy! and to you,  
 Children; as good a mother gave you birth.'

'Have courage!' interposed the friends. 'For him  
 I have no scruple to declare—all this  
 Will he perform, except he fail of sense.'

'All this shall be—shall be!' Admetos sobbed:  
 'Fear not! And, since I had thee living, dead  
 Alone wilt thou be called my wife: no fear  
 That some Thessalian ever styles herself  
 Bride, hails this man for husband in thy place!  
 No woman, be she of such lofty line  
 Or such surpassing beauty otherwise!  
 Enough of children: gain from these I have,  
 Such only may the Gods grant! since in thee  
 Absolute is our loss, where all was gain.  
 And I shall bear for thee no year-long grief,  
 But grief that lasts while my own days last, love!  
 Love! For my hate is she who bore me, now:  
 And him I hate, my father: loving-ones  
 Truly, in word not deed! But thou didst pay  
 All dearest to thee down, and buy my life,  
 Saving me so! Is there not cause enough  
 That I who part with such companionship  
 In thee, should make my moan? I moan, and more:  
 For I will end the feastings—social flow  
 O' the wine friends flock for, garlands and the Muse  
 That graced my dwelling. Never now for me  
 To touch the lyre, to lift my soul in song



At summons of the Lydian flute; since thou  
From out my life hast emptied all the joy!  
And this thy body, in thy likeness wrought  
By some wise hand of the artificers,  
Shall lie disposed within my marriage-bed:  
This I will fall on, this enfold about,  
Call by thy name,—my dear wife in my arms  
Even though I have not, I shall seem to have—  
A cold delight, indeed, but all the same  
So should I lighten of its weight my soul!  
And, wandering my way in dreams perchance,  
Thyself wilt bless me: for, come when they will,  
Even by night our loves are sweet to see.  
But were the tongue and tune of Orpheus mine,  
So that to Koré crying, or her lord,  
In hymns, from Hades I might rescue thee—  
Down would I go, and neither Plouton's dog  
Nor Charon, he whose oar sends souls across,  
Should stay me till again I made thee stand  
Living, within the light! But, failing this,  
There, where thou art, await me when I die,  
Make ready our abode, my house-mate still!  
For in the self-same cedar, me with thee  
Will I provide that these our friends shall place,  
My side lay close by thy side! Never, corpse  
Although I be, would I division bear  
From thee, my faithful one of all the world!

So he stood sobbing: nowise insincere,  
But somehow child-like, like his children, like  
Childishness the world over. What was new  
In this announcement that his wife must die?  
What particle of pain beyond the pact  
He made, with eyes wide open, long ago—  
Made and was, if not glad, content to make?  
Now that the sorrow, he had called for, came.  
He sorrowed to the height: none heard him say,  
However, what would seem so pertinent,  
'To keep this pact, I find surpass my power:  
Rescind it, Moirai! Give me back her life,  
And take the life I kept by base exchange!  
Or, failing that, here stands your laughing-stock  
Fooled by you, worthy just the fate o' the fool

Who makes a pother to escape the best  
 And gain the worst you wiser Powers allot!  
 No, not one word of this: nor did his wife  
 Despite the sobbing, and the silence soon  
 To follow, judge so much was in his thought—  
 Fancy that, should the Moirai acquiesce,  
 He would relinquish life nor let her die.  
 The man was like some merchant who, in storm,  
 Throws the freight over to redeem the ship:  
 No question, saving both were better still.  
 As it was,—why, he sorrowed, which sufficed.  
 So, all she seemed to notice in his speech  
 Was what concerned her children. Children, too,  
 Bear the grief and accept the sacrifice.  
 Rightly rules nature: does the blossomed bough  
 O' the grape-vine, or the dry grape's self, bleed wine  
 So, bending to her children all her love,  
 She fastened on their father's only word  
 To purpose now, and followed it with this.  
 'O children, now yourselves have heard these things—  
 Your father saying he will never wed  
 Another woman to be over you,  
 Nor yet dishonour me!'

'And now at least  
 I say it, and I will accomplish too!'

'Then, for such promise of accomplishment,  
 Take from my hand these children!'

'Thus I take—  
 Dear gift from the dear hand!'

'Do thou become  
 Mother, now, to these children in my place!'

'Great the necessity I should be so,  
 At least, to these bereaved of thee!'

'Child—child!  
 Just when I needed most to live, below  
 Am I departing from you both!'

'Ah me!  
 And what shall I do, then, left lonely thus?'



'Time will appease thee: who is dead is nought.'

'Take me with thee—take, by the Gods below!'

'We are sufficient, we who die for thee.'

'Oh, Powers, ye widow me of what a wife!'

'And truly the dimmed eye draws earthward now!'

'Wife, if thou leav'st me, I am lost indeed!'

'She once was—now is nothing, thou mayst say.'

'Raise thy face nor forsake thy children thus!'

'Ah, willingly indeed I leave them not!  
But—fare ye well, my children!'

'Look on them—  
Look!'

'I am nothingness.'

'What dost thou? Leav'st . . .'

'Farewell!'

And in the breath she passed away.  
'Undone—me miserable!' moaned the king,  
While friends released the long-suspended sigh  
'Gone is she: no wife for Admetos more!'

Such was the signal: how the woe broke forth,  
Why tell?—or how the children's tears ran fast  
Bidding their father note the eyelids' stare  
Hands' droop, each dreadful circumstance of death.

'Ay, she hears not, she sees not: I and you,  
'T is plain, are stricken hard and have to bear!  
Was all Admetos answered; for, I judge,  
He only now began to taste the truth:  
The thing done lay revealed, which undone thing,  
Rehearsed for fact by fancy, at the best,

Never can equal. He had used himself  
 This long while (as he muttered presently)  
 To practise with the terms, the blow involved  
 By the bargain, sharp to bear, but bearable  
 Because of plain advantage at the end.  
 Now that, in fact not fancy, the blow fell—  
 Needs must he busy him with the surprise.  
 'Alkestis—not to see her nor be seen,  
 Hear nor be heard of by her, any more  
 To-day, to-morrow, to the end of time—  
 Did I mean this should buy my life?' thought he.

So, friends came round him, took him by the hand,  
 Bade him remember our mortality,  
 Its due, its doom: how neither was he first,  
 Nor would be last, to thus deplore the loved.

'I understand' slow the words came at last.  
 'Nor of a sudden did the evil here  
 Fly on me: I have known it long ago,  
 Ay, and essayed myself in misery;  
 Nothing is new. You have to stay, you friends,  
 Because the next need is to carry forth  
 The corpse here: you must stay and do your part,  
 Chant proper pæan to the God below;  
 Drink-sacrifice he likes not. I decree  
 That all Thessalians over whom I rule  
 Hold grief in common with me; let them shear  
 Their locks, and be the peplos black they show!  
 And you who to the chariot yoke your steeds,  
 Or manage steeds one-frontleted,—I charge,  
 Clip from each neck with steel the mane away!  
 And through my city, nor of flute nor lyre  
 Be there a sound till twelve full moons succeed.  
 For I shall never bury any corpse  
 Dearer than this to me, nor better friend:  
 One worthy of all honour from me, since  
 Me she has died for, she and she alone.'

With that, he sought the inmost of the house,  
 He and his dead, to get grave's garniture,  
 While the friends sang the pæan that should peal.  
 'Daughter of Pelias, with farewell from me,

I' the house of Hades have thy unsunned home!  
Let Hades know, the dark-haired deity,—  
And he who sits to row and steer alike,  
Old corpse-conductor, let him know he bears  
Over the Acherontian lake, this time,  
I' the two-oared boat, the best—oh, best by far  
Of womankind! For thee, Alkestis Queen!  
Many a time those haunters of the Muse  
Shall sing thee to the seven-stringed mountain shell,  
And glorify in hymns that need no harp,  
At Sparta when the cycle comes about,  
And that Karneian month wherein the moon  
Rises and never sets the whole night through:  
So too at splendid and magnificent  
Athenai. Such the spread of thy renown,  
And such the lay that, dying, thou hast left  
Singer and sayer. Oh that I availed  
Of my own might to send thee once again  
From Hades' hall, Kokutos' stream, by help  
O' the oar that dips the river, back to day!

So, the song sank to prattle in her praise:  
'Light, from above thee, lady, fall the earth,  
Thou only one of womankind to die,  
Wife for her husband! If Admetos take  
Anything to him like a second spouse—  
Hate from his offspring and from us shall be  
His portion, let the king assure himself!  
No mind his mother had to hide in earth  
Her body for her son's sake, nor his sire  
Had heart to save whom he begot,—not they,  
The white-haired wretches! only thou it was,  
I' the bloom of youth, didst save him and so die!  
Might it be mine to chance on such a mate  
And partner! For there's penury in life  
Of such allowance: were she mine at least,  
So wonderful a wife, assuredly  
She would companion me throughout my days  
And never once bring sorrow!'

A great voice—

'My hosts here!'

Oh, the thrill that ran through us!  
Never was aught so good and opportune

As that great interrupting voice! For see!  
 Here maundered this dispirited old age  
 Before the palace; whence a something crept  
 Which told us well enough without a word  
 What was a-doing inside,—every touch  
 O' the garland on those temples, tenderest  
 Disposure of each arm along its side,  
 Came putting out what warmth i' the world was left.  
 Then, as it happens at a sacrifice  
 When, drop by drop, some lustral bath is brimmed  
 Into the thin and clear and cold, at once  
 They slaughter a whole wine-skin: Bacchos' blood  
 Sets the white water all a-flame; even so,  
 Sudden into the midst of sorrow, leapt  
 Along with the gay cheer of that great voice,  
 Hope, joy, salvation: Herakles was here!  
 Himself, o' the threshold, sent his voice on first  
 To herald all that human and divine  
 I' the weary happy face of him,—half God,  
 Half man, which made the god-part God the more.

'Hosts mine,' he broke upon the sorrow with,  
 'Inhabitants of this Pheraian soil,  
 Chance I upon Admetos inside here?'  
 The irresistible sound wholesome heart  
 O' the hero,—more than all the mightiness  
 At labour in the limbs that, for man's sake,  
 Laboured and meant to labour their life long,—  
 This drove back, dried up sorrow at its source.  
 How could it brave the happy weary laugh  
 Of who had bantered sorrow 'Sorrow here?  
 What have you done to keep your friend from harm?  
 Could no one give the life I see he keeps?  
 Or, say there's sorrow here past friendly help,  
 Why waste a word or let a tear escape  
 While other sorrows wait you in the world,  
 And want the life of you, though helpless here?'  
 Clearly there was no telling such an one  
 How, when their monarch tried who loved him more  
 Than he loved them, and found they loved, as he,  
 Each man, himself, and held, no otherwise,  
 That, of all evils in the world, the worst  
 Was—being forced to die, whate'er death gain:

How all this selfishness in him and them  
Caused certain sorrow which they sang about,—  
I think that Herakles, who held his life  
Out on his hand, for any man to take—  
I think his laugh had marred their threnody.

'He is in the house' they answered. After all,  
They might have told the story, talked their best  
About the inevitable sorrow here,  
Nor changed nor checked the kindly nature,—no!  
So long as men were merely weak, not bad,  
He loved men: were they Gods he used to help?  
'Yea, Pheres' son is in-doors, Herakles.  
But say, what sends thee to Thessalian soil,  
Brought by what business to this Pherai town?'

'A certain labour that I have to do  
Eurustheus the Tirunthian,' laughed the God.

And whither wendest—on what wandering  
Bound now?' (they had an instinct, guessed what meant  
Wanderings, labours, in the God's light mouth.)

'After the Thrakian Diomedes' car  
With the four horses.'

'Ah, but canst thou that?  
Art inexperienced in thy host to be?'

'All-inexperienced: I have never gone  
As yet to the land o' the Bistones.'

'Then, look  
By no means to be master of the steeds  
Without a battle!'

'Battle there may be:  
I must refuse no labour, all the same.'

'Certainly, either having slain a foe  
Wilt thou return to us, or, slain thyself,  
Stay there!'

'And, even if the game be so,  
The risk in it were not the first I run.'

'But, say thou overpower the lord o' the place.  
What more advantage dost expect thereby?'

'I shall drive off his horses to the king.'

'No easy handling them to bit the jaw!'

'Easy enough; except, at least, they breathe  
Fire from their nostrils!'

'But they mince up men  
With those quick jaws!'

'You talk of provender  
For mountain-beasts, and not mere horses' food!'

'Thou mayst behold their mangers caked with gore!'  
'And of what sire does he who bred them boast  
Himself the son?'

'Of Ares, king o' the targe—  
Thrakian, of gold throughout.'

Another laugh.

'Why, just the labour, just the lot for me  
Dost thou describe in what I recognize!  
Since hard and harder, high and higher yet,  
Truly this lot of mine is like to go  
If I must needs join battle with the brood  
Of Ares: ay, I fought Lukaon first,  
And again, Kuknos: now engage in strife  
This third time, with such horses and such lord.  
But there is nobody shall ever see  
Alkmené's son shrink foemen's hand before!'

—'Or ever hear him say' (the Chorus thought)  
'That death is terrible; and help us so  
To chime in—"terrible beyond a doubt,  
And, if to thee, why, to ourselves much more:  
Know what has happened, then, and sympathize"!''  
Therefore they gladly stopped the dialogue,  
Shifted the burthen to new shoulder straight,  
As, 'Look where comes the lord o' the land, himself,  
Admetos, from the palace!' they outbroke  
In some surprise, as well as much relief.  
What had induced the king to waive his right  
And luxury of woe in loneliness?



Out he came quietly; the hair was clipt,  
And the garb sable; else no outward sign  
Of sorrow as he came and faced his friend.  
Was truth fast terrifying tears away?  
'Hail, child of Zeus, and sprung from Perseus too!'  
The salutation ran without a fault.

'And thou, Admetos, King of Thessaly!'

'Would, as thou wishest me, the grace might fall!  
But my good-wisher, that thou art, I know.'

‘What ’s here? these shorn locks, this sad show of thee?’

'I must inter a certain corpse to-day.'

‘Now, from thy children God avert mischance!’

‘They live, my children; all are in the house!’

‘Thy father—if ’t is he departs indeed,  
His age was ripe at least.’

‘My father lives,  
And she who bore me lives too, Herakles.’

‘It cannot be thy wife, Alkestis gone?’

'Two-fold the tale is, I can tell of her.'

‘Dead dost thou speak of her, or living yet?’

'She is—and is not: hence the pain to me!'

'I learn no whit the more, so dark thy speech!'

'Know'st thou not on what fate she needs must fall?'

'I know she is resigned to die for thee.'

‘How lives she still, then, if submitting so?’

‘Eh, weep her not beforehand! wait till then!’

'Who is to die is dead; doing is done.'

'To be and not to be are thought diverse.'

'Thou judgest this—I, that way, Herakles!'

'Well, but declare what causes thy complaint!  
Who is the man has died from out thy friends?'

'No man: I had a woman in my mind.'

'Alien, or someone born akin to thee?'

'Alien: but still related to my house.'

'How did it happen then that here she died?'

'Her father dying left his orphan here.'

'Alas, Admetos—would we found thee gay,  
Not grieving!'

'What as if about to do  
Subjoinest thou that comment?'

'I shall seek  
Another hearth, proceed to other hosts.'

'Never, O king, shall that be! No such ill  
Betide me!'

'Nay, to mourners should there come  
A guest, he proves importunate!'

'The dead—  
Dead are they: but go thou within my house!'

'T is base carousing beside friends who mourn.'

'The guest-rooms, whither we shall lead thee, lie  
Apart from ours.'

'Nay, let me go my way,  
Ten thousandfold the favour I shall thank!'

'It may not be thou goest to the hearth  
Of any man but me!' so made an end

Admetos, softly and decisively,  
Of the altercation. Herakles forbore:  
And the king bade a servant lead the way,  
Open the guest-rooms ranged remote from view  
O' the main hall; tell the functionaries, next,  
They had to furnish forth a plenteous feast,  
And then shut close the doors o' the hall, midway,  
'Because it is not proper friends who feast  
Should hear a groaning or be grieved,' quoth he.

Whereat the hero, who was truth itself,  
Let out the smile again, repressed awhile  
Like fountain-brilliance one forbids to play.  
He did too many grandnesses, to note  
Much in the meaner things about his path:  
And stepping there, with face towards the sun,  
Stopped seldom to pluck weeds or ask their names.  
Therefore he took Admetos at the word:  
This trouble must not hinder any more  
A true heart from good will and pleasant ways.  
And so, the great arm, which had slain the snake,  
Strained his friend's head a moment in embrace  
On that broad breast beneath the lion's hide,  
Till the king's cheek winced at the thick rough gold  
And then strode off, with who had care of him,  
To the remote guest-chamber: glad to give  
Poor flesh and blood their respite and relief  
In the interval 'twixt fight and fight again—  
All for the world's sake. Our eyes followed him,  
Be sure, till those mid-doors shut us outside.  
The king, too, watched great Herakles go off  
All faith, love, and obedience to a friend.

And when they questioned him, the simple ones,  
'What dost thou? Such calamity to face,  
Lies full before thee—and thou art so bold  
As play the host, Admetos? Hast thy wits?'  
He replied calmly to each chiding tongue:  
'But if from house and home I forced away  
A coming guest, wouldst thou have praised me more?  
No, truly! since calamity were mine,  
Nowise diminished; while I showed myself  
Unhappy and inhospitable too:

So adding to my ills this other ill,  
 That mine were styled a stranger-hating house.  
 Myself have ever found this man the best  
 Of entertainers when I went his way  
 To parched and thirsty Argos.'

'If so be—

Why didst thou hide what destiny was here,  
 When one came that was kindly, as thou say'st?'

'He never would have willed to cross my door  
 Had he known aught of my calamities.  
 And probably to some of you I seem  
 Unwise enough in doing what I do;  
 Such will scarce praise me: but these halls of mine  
 Know not to drive off and dishonour guests.'

And so, the duty done, he turned once more  
 To go and busy him about his dead.  
 As for the sympathizers left to muse,  
 There was a change, a new light thrown on things,  
 Contagion from the magnanimity  
 O' the man whose life lay on his hand so light,  
 As up he stepped, pursuing duty still  
 'Higher and harder,' as he laughed and said.  
 Somehow they found no folly now in the act  
 They blamed erewhile: Admetos' private grief  
 Shrank to a somewhat pettier obstacle  
 I' the way o' the world: they saw good days had been,  
 And good days, peradventure, still might be,  
 Now that they overlooked the present cloud  
 Heavy upon the palace opposite.  
 And soon the thought took words and music thus.

'Harbour of many a stranger, free to friend,  
 Ever and always, O thou house o' the man  
 We mourn for! Thee, Apollon's very self,  
 The lyric Puthian, deigned inhabit once,  
 Become a shepherd here in thy domains,  
 And pipe, adown the winding hill-side paths,  
 Pastoral marriage-poems to thy flocks  
 At feed: while with them fed in fellowship,  
 Through joy i' the music, spot-skin lynxes; ay,  
 And lions too, the bloody company,

Came, leaving Othrus' dell; and round thy lyre,  
Phoibos, there danced the speckle-coated fawn,  
Pacing on lightsome fetlock past the pines  
Tress-topped, the creature's natural boundary,  
Into the open everywhere; such heart  
Had she within her, beating joyous beats,  
At the sweet reassurance of thy song!  
Therefore the lot o' the master is, to live  
In a home multitudinous with herds,  
Along by the fair-flowing Boibian lake,  
Limited, that ploughed land and pasture-plain,  
Only where stand the sun's steeds, stabled west  
I' the cloud, by that mid-air which makes the clime  
Of those Molossoi: and he rules as well  
O'er the Aigaian, up to Pelion's shore,—  
Sea-stretch without a port! Such lord have we:  
And here he opens house now, as of old,  
Takes to the heart of it a guest again:  
Though moist the eyelid of the master, still  
Mourning his dear wife's body, dead but now!'

And they admired: nobility of soul  
Was self-impelled to reverence, they saw:  
The best men ever prove the wisest too:  
Something instinctive guides them still aright.  
And on each soul this boldness settled now,  
That one, who revered the Gods so much,  
Would prosper yet: (or—I could wish it ran—  
Who venerates the Gods, i' the main will still  
Practise things honest though obscure to judge).  
They ended, for Admetos entered now;  
Having disposed all duteously indoors,  
He came into the outside world again,  
Quiet as ever: but a quietude  
Bent on pursuing its descent to truth,  
As who must grope until he gain the ground  
O' the dungeon doomed to be his dwelling now.  
Already high o'er head was piled the dusk,  
When something pushed to stay his downward step,  
Pluck back despair just reaching its repose.  
He would have bidden the kind presence there  
Observe that,—since the corpse was coming out,  
Cared for in all things that befit the case,

Carried aloft, in decency and state,  
To the last burial place and burning pile,—  
'T were proper friends addressed, as custom prompts,  
Alkestis bound on her last journeying.

'Ay, for we see thy father' they subjoined  
'Advancing as the aged foot best may;  
His servants, too: each bringing in his hand  
Adornments for thy wife, all pomp that 's due  
To the downward-dwelling people.' And in truth,  
By slow procession till they filled the stage,  
Came Pheres, and his following, and their gifts.  
You see, the worst of the interruption was,  
It plucked back, with an over-hasty hand,  
Admetos from descending to the truth,  
(I told you)—put him on the brink again,  
Full i' the noise and glare where late he stood:  
With no fate fallen and irrevocable,  
But all things subject still to chance and change:  
And that chance—life, and that change—happiness.  
And with the low strife came the little mind:  
He was once more the man might gain so much,  
Life too and wife too, would his friends but help!  
All he felt now was that there faced him one  
Supposed the likeliest, in emergency,  
To help: and help, by mere self-sacrifice  
So natural, it seemed as if the sire  
Must needs lie open still to argument,  
Withdraw the rash decision, not to die  
But rather live, though death would save his son:—  
Argument like the ignominious grasp  
O' the drowner whom his fellow grasps as fierce,  
Each marvelling that the other needs must hold  
Head out of water, though friend choke thereby.

And first the father's salutation fell.  
Burthened, he came, in common with his child,  
Who lost, none would gainsay, a good chaste spouse:  
Yet such things must be borne, though hard to bear.  
'So, take this tribute of adornment, deep  
In the earth let it descend along with her!  
Behoves we treat the body with respect  
—Of one who died, at least, to save thy life,



Kept me from being childless, nor allowed  
That I, bereft of thee, should peak and pine  
In melancholy age! she, for the sex,  
All of her sisters, put in evidence,  
By daring such a feat, that female life  
Might prove more excellent than men suppose.  
O thou Alkestis!' out he burst in fine,  
'Who, while thou savedst this my son, didst raise  
Also myself from sinking,—hail to thee!  
Well be it with thee even in the house  
Of Hades! I maintain, if mortals must  
Marry, this sort of marriage is the sole  
Permitted those among them who are wise!'

So his oration ended. Like hates like:  
Accordingly Admetos,—full i' the face  
Of Pheres, his true father, outward shape  
And inward fashion, body matching soul,—  
Saw just himself when years should do their work  
And reinforce the selfishness inside  
Until it pushed the last disguise away:  
As when the liquid metal cools i' the mould,  
Stands forth a statue: bloodless, hard, cold bronze.  
So, in old Pheres, young Admetos showed,  
Pushed to completion: and a shudder ran,  
And his repugnance soon had vent in speech:  
Glad to escape outside, nor, pent within,  
Find itself there fit food for exercise.

'Neither to this interment called by me  
Comest thou, nor thy presence I account  
Among the covetable proofs of love.  
As for thy tribute of adornment,—no!  
Ne'er shall she don it, ne'er in debt to thee  
Be buried! What is thine, that keep thou still!  
Then it behoved thee to commiserate  
When I was perishing: but thou—who stood'st  
Foot-free o' the snare, wast acquiescent then  
That I, the young, should die, not thou, the old  
Wilt thou lament this corpse thyself hast slain?  
Thou wast not, then, true father to this flesh;  
Nor she, who makes profession of my birth  
And styles herself my mother, neither she

Bore me: but, come of slave's blood, I was cast  
Stealthily 'neath the bosom of thy wife!  
Thou showedst, put to touch, the thing thou art,  
Nor I esteem myself born child of thee!  
Otherwise, thine is the preëminence  
O'er all the world in cowardice of soul:  
Who, being the old man thou art, arrived  
Where life should end, didst neither will nor dare  
Die for thy son, but left the task to her,  
The alien woman, whom I well might think  
Own, only mother both and father too!  
And yet a fair strife had been thine to strive,  
—Dying for thy own child; and brief for thee  
In any case, the rest of time to live;  
While I had lived, and she, our rest of time,  
Not I been left to groan in solitude.  
Yet certainly all things which happy man  
Ought to experience, thy experience grasped.  
Thou wast a ruler through the bloom of youth,  
And I was son to thee, recipient due  
Of sceptre and demesne,—no need to fear  
That dying thou shouldst leave an orphan house  
For strangers to despoil. Nor yet wilt thou  
Allege that as dishonouring, forsooth,  
Thy length of days, I gave thee up to die,—  
I, who have held thee in such reverence!  
And in exchange for it, such gratitude  
Thou, father,—thou award'st me, mother mine!  
Go, lose no time, then, in begetting sons  
Shall cherish thee in age, and, when thou diest,  
Deck up and lay thee out as corpses claim!  
For never I, at least, with this my hand  
Will bury thee: it is myself am dead  
So far as lies in thee. But if I light  
Upon another saviour, and still see  
The sunbeam,—his, the child I call myself,  
His, the old age that claims my cherishing.  
How vainly do these aged pray for death,  
Abuse the slow drag of senility!  
But should death step up, nobody inclines  
To die, nor age is now the weight it was!'

You see what all this poor pretentious talk

Tried at,—how weakness strove to hide itself  
In bluster against weakness,—the loud word  
To hide the little whisper, not so low  
Already in that heart beneath those lips!  
Ha, could it be, who hated cowardice  
Stood confessed craven, and who lauded so  
Self-immolating love, himself had pushed  
The loved one to the altar in his place?  
Friends interposed, would fain stop further play  
O' the sharp-edged tongue: they felt love's champion here  
Had left an undefended point or two,  
The antagonist might profit by; bade 'Pause!  
Enough the present sorrow! Nor, O son,  
Whet thus against thyself thy father's soul!'

Ay, but old Pheres was the stouter stuff!  
Admetos, at the flintiest of the heart,  
Had so much soft in him as held a fire:  
The other was all iron, clashed from flint  
Its fire, but shed no spark and showed no bruise.  
Did Pheres crave instruction as to facts?  
He came, content, the ignoble word, for him,  
Should lurk still in the blackness of each breast,  
As sleeps the water-serpent half surmised:  
Not brought up to the surface at a bound,  
By one touch of the idly-probing spear,  
Reed-like against unconquerable scale.  
He came pacific, rather, as strength should,  
Bringing the decent praise, the due regret,  
And each banality prescribed of old.  
Did he commence 'Why let her die for you?'  
And rouse the coiled and quiet ugliness  
'What is so good to man as man's own life?'  
No: but the other did: and, for his pains,  
Out, full in face of him, the venom leapt.

'And whom dost thou make bold, son—Ludian slave,  
Or Phrugian whether, money made thy ware,  
To drive at with revilings? Know'st thou not  
I, a Thessalian, from Thessalian sire  
Spring and am born legitimately free?  
Too arrogant art thou; and, youngster words  
Casting against me, having had thy fling,

Thou goest not off as all were ended so!  
I gave thee birth indeed and mastership  
I' the mansion, brought thee up to boot: there ends  
My owing, nor extends to die for thee!  
Never did I receive it as a law  
Hereditary, no, nor Greek at all,  
That sires in place of sons were bound to die.  
For, to thy sole and single self wast thou  
Born, with whatever fortune, good or bad;  
Such things as bear bestowment, those thou hast;  
Already ruling widely, broad-lands, too,  
Doubt not but I shall leave thee in due time:  
For why? My father left me them before.  
Well then, where wrong I thee?—Of what defraud?  
Neither do thou die for this man, myself,  
Nor let him die for thee!—is all I beg.  
Thou joyest seeing daylight: dost suppose  
Thy father joys not too? Undoubtedly,  
Long I account the time to pass below,  
And brief my span of days; yet sweet the same:  
Is it otherwise to thee who, impudent,  
Didst fight off this same death, and livest now  
Through having sneaked past fate apportioned thee,  
And slain thy wife so? Cryest cowardice  
On me, I wonder, thou—whom, poor poltroon,  
A very woman worsted, daring death  
Just for the sake of thee, her handsome spark?  
Shrewdly hast thou contrived how not to die  
For evermore now: 't is but still persuade  
The wife, for the time being, to take thy place!  
What, and thy friends who would not do the like,  
These dost thou carp at, craven thus thyself?  
Crouch and be silent, craven! Comprehend  
That, if thou lovest so that life of thine,  
Why, everybody loves his own life too:  
So, good words, henceforth! If thou speak us ill,  
Many and true an ill thing shalt thou hear!

There you saw leap the hydra at full length!  
Only, the old kept glorying the more,  
The more the portent thus uncoiled itself,  
Whereas the young man shuddered head to foot,  
And shrank from kinship with the creature. Why

Such horror, unless what he hated most,  
Vaunting itself outside, might fairly claim  
Acquaintance with the counterpart at home?  
I would the Chorus here had plucked up heart,  
Spoken out boldly and explained the man,  
If not to men, to Gods. That way, I think,  
Sophokles would have led their dance and song.  
Here, they said simply 'Too much evil spoke  
On both sides!' As the young before, so now  
They bade the old man leave abusing thus.

'Let him speak,—I have spoken!' said the youth  
And so died out the wrangle by degrees  
In wretched bickering. 'If thou wince at fact,  
Behoved thee not prove faulty to myself!'

'Had I died for thee I had faulted more!'

'All 's one, then, for youth's bloom and age to die?'

'Our duty is to live one life, not two!'

'Go then, and outlive Zeus, for aught I care!'

'What, curse thy parents with no sort of cause?'

'Curse, truly! All thou lovest is long life!'

'And dost not thou, too, all for love of life,  
Carry out now, in place of thine, this corpse?'

'Monument, rather, of thy cowardice,  
Thou worst one!'

'Not for me she died, I hope!  
That, thou wilt hardly say!'

'No, simply this:  
Would, some day, thou mayst come to need myself!'

'Meanwhile, woo many wives—the more will die!'

'And so shame thee who never dared the like!'

'Dear is this light o' the sun-god—dear, I say!'

'Proper conclusion for a beast to draw!'

'One thing is certain: there 's no laughing now,  
As out thou bearest the poor dead old man!'

'Die when thou wilt, thou wilt die infamous!'

'And once dead, whether famed or infamous,  
I shall not care!'

'Alas and yet again!  
How full is age of impudency!'

'True!

Thou couldst not call thy young wife impudent:  
She was found foolish merely.'

'Get thee gone!

And let me bury this my dead!'

'I go.

Thou buriest her whom thou didst murder first;  
Whereof there 's some account to render yet  
Those kinsfolk by the marriage-side! I think,  
Brother Akastos may be classed with me,  
Among the beasts, not men, if he omit  
Avenging upon thee his sister's blood!'

'Go to perdition, with thy housemate too!  
Grow old all childlessly, with child alive,  
Just as ye merit! for to me, at least,  
Beneath the same roof ne'er do ye return.  
And did I need by heralds' help renounce  
The ancestral hearth, I had renounced the same!  
But we—since this woe, lying at our feet  
I' the path, is to be borne—let us proceed  
And lay the body on the pyre.'

I think,

What, thro' this wretched wrangle, kept the man  
From seeing clear—beside the cause I gave—  
Was, that the woe, himself described as full  
I' the path before him, there did really lie—  
Not roll into the abyss of dead and gone.  
How, with Alkestis present, calmly crowned,  
Was she so irrecoverable yet—  
The bird, escaped, that 's just on bough above,  
The flower, let flutter half-way down the brink?



Not so detached seemed lifelessness from life  
But—one dear stretch beyond all straining yet—  
And he might have her at his heart once more,  
When, in the critical minute, up there comes  
The father and the fact, to trifle time!

‘To the pyre!’ an instinct prompted: pallid face,  
And passive arm and pointed foot, when these  
No longer shall absorb the sight, O friends,  
Admetos will begin to see indeed  
Who the true foe was, where the blows should fall.

So, the old selfish Pheres went his way,  
Case-hardened as he came; and left the youth,  
(Only half-selfish now, since sensitive)  
To go on learning by a light the more,  
As friends moved off, renewing dirge the while:

‘Unhappy in thy daring! Noble dame,  
Best of the good, farewell! With favouring face  
May Hermes the infernal, Hades too,  
Receive thee! And if there,—ay, there,—some touch  
Of further dignity await the good,  
Sharing with them, mayst thou sit throned by her  
The Bride of Hades, in companionship!’

Wherewith, the sad procession wound away,  
Made slowly for the suburb sepulchre.  
And lo,—while still one’s heart, in time and tune,  
Paced after that symmetric step of Death  
Mute-marching, to the mind’s eye, at the head  
O’ the mourners—one hand pointing out their path  
With the long pale terrific sword we saw,  
The other leading, with grim tender grace,  
Alkestis quieted and consecrate,—  
Lo, life again knocked laughing at the door!  
The world goes on, goes ever, in and through,  
And out again o’ the cloud. We faced about,  
Fronted the palace where the mid-hall-gate  
Opened—not half, nor half of half, perhaps—  
Yet wide enough to let out light and life,  
And warmth and bounty and hope and joy, at once  
Festivity burst wide, fruit rare and ripe

Crushed in the mouth of Bacchos, pulpy-prime,  
All juice and flavour, save one single seed  
Duly ejected from the God's nice lip,  
Which lay o' the red edge, blackly visible—  
To wit, a certain ancient servitor:  
On whom the festal jaws o' the palace shut,  
So, there he stood, a much-bewildered man.  
Stupid? Nay, but sagacious in a sort:  
Learned, life long, i' the first outside of things,  
Though bat for blindness to what lies beneath  
And needs a nail-scratch ere 't is laid you bare.  
This functionary was the trusted one  
We saw deputed by Admetos late  
To lead in Herakles and help him, soul  
And body, to such snatched repose, snapped-up  
Sustainment, as might do away the dust  
O' the last encounter, knit each nerve anew  
For that next onset sure to come at cry  
O' the creature next assailed,—nay, should it prove  
Only the creature that came forward now  
To play the critic upon Herakles!

'Many the guests'—so he soliloquized  
In musings burdensome to breast before,  
When it seemed not too prudent tongue should wag—  
'Many, and from all quarters of this world,  
The guests I now have known frequent our house,  
For whom I spread the banquet; but than this,  
Never a worse one did I yet receive  
At the hearth here! One who seeing, first of all,  
The master's sorrow, entered gate the same,  
And had the hardihood to house himself.  
Did things stop there! But, modest by no means,  
He took what entertainment lay to hand,  
Knowing of our misfortune,—did we fail  
In aught of the fit service, urged us serve  
Just as a guest expects! And in his hands  
Taking the ivied goblet, drinks and drinks  
The unmixed product of black mother-earth,  
Until the blaze o' the wine went round about  
And warmed him: then he crowns with myrtle sprigs  
His head, and howls discordance—twofold lay  
Was thereupon for us to listen to—

This fellow singing, namely, nor restrained  
A jot by sympathy with sorrows here—  
While we o' the household mourned our mistress—  
mourned,  
That is to say, in silence—never showed  
The eyes, which we kept wetting, to the guest—  
For there Admetos was imperative.  
And so, here am I helping make at home  
A guest, some fellow ripe for wickedness,  
Robber or pirate, while she goes her way  
Out of our house: and neither was it mine  
To follow in procession, nor stretch forth  
Hand, wave my lady dear a last farewell,  
Lamenting who to me and all of us  
Domestics was a mother: myriad harms  
She used to ward away from every one,  
And mollify her husband's ireful mood.  
I ask then, do I justly hate or no  
This guest, this interloper on our grief?'

'Hate him and justly!' Here 's the proper judge  
Of what is due to the house from Herakles!  
This man of much experience saw the first  
O' the feeble duckings-down at destiny,  
When King Admetos went his rounds, poor soul,  
A-begging somebody to be so brave  
As die for one afraid to die himself—  
'Thou, friend? Thou, love? Father or mother, then!  
None of you? What, Alkestis must Death catch?  
O best of wives, one woman in the world!  
But nowise droop: our prayers may still assist:  
Let us try sacrifice; if those avail  
Nothing and Gods avert their countenance,  
Why, deep and durable our grief will be!'  
Whereat the house, this worthy at its head,  
Re-echoed 'deep and durable our grief!'  
This sage, who justly hated Herakles,  
Did he suggest once 'Rather I than she!'  
Admonish the Turannos—'Be a man!  
Bear thine own burden, never think to thrust  
Thy fate upon another and thy wife!  
It were a dubious gain could death be doomed  
That other, and no passionatest plea  
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Of thine, to die instead, have force with fate;  
Seeing thou lov'st Alkestis: what were life  
Unlighted by the loved one? But to live—  
Not merely live unsolaced by some thought,  
Some word so poor—yet solace all the same—  
As "Thou i' the sepulchre, Alkestis, say!  
Would I, or would not I, to save thy life,  
Die, and die on, and die for evermore?"  
No! but to read red-written up and down  
The world "This is the sunshine, this the shade,  
This is some pleasure of earth, sky or sea,  
Due to that other, dead that thou mayst live!"  
Such were a covetable gain to thee?  
Go die, fool, and be happy while 't is time!  
One word of counsel in this kind, methinks,  
Had fallen to better purpose than Ai, ai,  
Pheu, pheu, e, papai, and a pother of praise  
O' the best, best, best one! Nothing was to hate  
In King Admetos, Pheres, and the rest  
O' the household down to his heroic self!  
This was the one thing hateful: Herakles  
Had flung into the presence, frank and free,  
Out from the labour into the repose,  
Ere out again and over head and ears  
I' the heart of labour, all for love of men:  
Making the most o' the minute, that the soul  
And body, strained to height a minute since,  
Might lie relaxed in joy, this breathing-space,  
For man's sake more than ever; till the bow,  
Restrung o' the sudden, at first cry for help,  
Should send some unimaginable shaft  
True to the aim and shatteringly through  
The plate-mail of a monster, save man so.  
He slew the pest o' the marish yesterday:  
To-morrow he would bit the flame-breathed stud  
That fed on man's-flesh: and this day between—  
Because he held it natural to die,  
And fruitless to lament a thing past cure,  
So, took his fill of food, wine, song and flowers,  
Till the new labour claimed him soon enough,—  
'Hate him and justly!'

True, Charopé mine!  
The man surmised not Herakles lay hid

I' the guest; or, knowing it, was ignorant  
That still his lady lived—for Herakles;  
Or else judged lightness needs must indicate  
This or the other caitiff quality:  
And therefore—had been right if not so wrong!  
For who expects the sort of him will scratch  
A nail's depth, scrape the surface just to see  
What peradventure underlies the same?

So, he stood petting up his puny hate,  
Parent-wise, proud of the ill-favoured babe.  
Not long! A great hand, careful lest it crush,  
Startled him on the shoulder: up he stared,  
And over him, who stood but Herakles!  
There smiled the mighty presence, all one smile  
And no touch more of the world-weary God,  
Through the brief respite. Just a garland's grace  
About the brow, a song to satisfy  
Head, heart, and breast, and trumpet-lips at once,  
A solemn draught of true religious wine,  
And,—how should I know?—half a mountain goat  
Torn up and swallowed down,—the feast was fierce  
But brief: all cares and pains took wing and flew,  
Leaving the hero ready to begin  
And help mankind, whatever woe came next,  
Even though what came next should be nought more  
Than the mean querulous mouth o' the man, remarked  
Pursing its grievance up till patience failed  
And the sage needs must rush out, as we saw  
To sulk outside and pet his hate in peace.  
By no means would the Helper have it so;  
He who was just about to handle brutes  
In Thrace, and bit the jaws which breathed the flame,—  
Well, if a good laugh and a jovial word  
Could bridle age which blew bad humours forth,  
That were a kind of help, too!

‘Thou, there!’ hailed

This grand benevolence the ungracious one—  
‘Why look'st so solemn and so thought-absorbed?  
To guests a servant should not sour-faced be,  
But do the honours with a mind urbane.  
While thou, contrariwise, beholding here  
Arrive thy master's comrade, hast for him

A churlish visage, all one beetle-brow—  
 Having regard to grief that 's out-of-door!  
 Come hither, and so get to grow more wise!  
 Things mortal—know'st the nature that they have?  
 No, I imagine! whence could knowledge spring?  
 Give ear to me, then! For all flesh to die,  
 Is nature's due; nor is there any one  
 Of mortals with assurance he shall last  
 The coming morrow: for, what 's born of chance  
 Invisibly proceeds the way it will,  
 Not to be learned, no fortune-teller's prize.  
 This, therefore, having heard and known through me  
 Gladden thyself! Drink! Count the day-by-day  
 Existence thine, and all the other—chance!  
 Ay, and pay homage also to by far  
 The sweetest of divinities for man,  
 Kupris! Benignant Goddess will she prove!  
 But as for aught else, leave and let things be!  
 And trust my counsel, if I seem to speak  
 To purpose—as I do, apparently.  
 Wilt not thou, then,—discarding overmuch  
 Mournfulness, do away with this shut door,  
 Come drink along with me, be-garlanded  
 This fashion? Do so, and—I well know what—  
 From this stern mood, this shrunk-up state of mind,  
 The pit-pat fall o' the flagon-juice down throat  
 Soon will dislodge thee from bad harbourage!  
 Men being mortal should think mortal-like:  
 Since to your solemn, brow-contracting sort,  
 All of them,—so I lay down law at least,—  
 Life is not truly life but misery.'

Whereto the man with softened surliness:  
 'We know as much: but deal with matters, now,  
 Hardly befitting mirth and revelry.'

'No intimate, this woman that is dead:  
 Mourn not too much! For, those o' the house itself,  
 Thy masters live, remember!'

'Live indeed?  
 Ah, thou know'st nought o' the woe within these walls!'



'I do—unless thy master spoke me false  
Somehow!'

'Ay, ay, too much he loves a guest,  
Too much, that master mine!' so muttered he.

'Was it improper he should treat me well,  
Because an alien corpse was in the way?'

'No alien, but most intimate indeed!'

'Can it be, some woe was, he told me not?'

'Farewell and go thy way! Thy cares for thee—  
To us, our master's sorrow is a care.'

'This word begins no tale of alien woe!'

'Had it been other woe than intimate,  
I could have seen thee feast, nor felt amiss.'

'What! have I suffered strangely from my host?'

'Thou cam'st not at a fit reception-time:  
With sorrow here beforehand: and thou seest  
Shorn hair, black robes.'

'But who is it that 's dead?  
Some child gone? or the aged sire perhaps?'

'Admetos' wife, then! she has perished, guest!'

'How sayest? And did ye house me, all the same?'

'Ay: for he had thee in that reverence  
He dared not turn thee from his door away!'

'O hapless, and bereft of what a mate!'

'All of us now are dead, not she alone!'

'But I divined it! seeing, as I did,  
His eye that ran with tears, his close-clipt hair,  
His countenance! Though he persuaded me,  
Saying it was a stranger's funeral

He went with to the grave: against my wish,  
 He forced on me that I should enter doors,  
 Drink in the hall o' the hospitable man  
 Circumstanced so! And do I revel yet  
 With wreath on head? But—thou to hold thy peace  
 Nor tell me what a woe oppressed my friend!  
 Where is he gone to bury her? Where am I  
 To go and find her?'

'By the road that leads  
 Straight to Larissa, thou wilt see the tomb,  
 Out of the suburb, a carved sepulchre.'

So said he, and therewith dismissed himself  
 Inside to his lamenting: somewhat soothed,  
 However, that he had adroitly spoilt  
 The mirth of the great creature: oh, he marked  
 The movement of the mouth, how lip pressed lip,  
 And either eye forgot to shine, as, fast,  
 He plucked the chaplet from his forehead, dashed  
 The myrtle-sprays down, trod them underfoot!  
 And all the joy and wonder of the wine  
 Withered away, like fire from off a brand  
 The wind blows over—beacon though it be,  
 Whose merry ardour only meant to make  
 Somebody all the better for its blaze,  
 And save lost people in the dark: quenched now!

Not long quenched! As the flame, just hurried off  
 The brand's edge, suddenly renews its bite,  
 Tasting some richness caked i' the core o' the tree,—  
 Pine, with a blood that's oil,—and triumphs up  
 Pillar-wise to the sky and saves the world:  
 So, in a spasm and splendour of resolve,  
 All at once did the God surmount the man.

'O much-enduring heart and hand of mine!  
 Now show what sort of son she bore to Zeus,  
 That daughter of Elektruon, Tiruns' child,  
 Alkmené! for that son must needs save now  
 The just-dead lady: ay, establish here  
 I' the house again Alkestis, bring about  
 Comfort and succour to Admetos so!

I will go lie in wait for Death, black-stoled  
King of the corpses! I shall find him, sure,  
Drinking, beside the tomb, o' the sacrifice:  
And if I lie in ambuscade, and leap  
Out of my lair, and seize—encircle him  
Till one hand join the other round about—  
There lives not who shall pull him out from me,  
Rib-mauled, before he let the woman go!  
But even say I miss the booty,—say,  
Death comes not to the boltered blood,—why then,  
Down go I, to the unsunned dwelling-place  
Of Koré and the king there,—make demand,  
Confident I shall bring Alkestis back,  
So as to put her in the hands of him  
My host, that housed me, never drove me off:  
Though stricken with sore sorrow, hid the stroke,  
Being a noble heart and honouring me!  
Who of Thessalians, more than this man, loves  
The stranger? Who, that now inhabits Greece?  
Wherefore he shall not say the man was vile  
Whom he befriended,—native noble heart!

So, one look upward, as if Zeus might laugh  
Approval of his human progeny,—  
One summons of the whole magnific frame,  
Each sinew to its service,—up he caught,  
And over shoulder cast, the lion-shag,  
Let the club go,—for had he not those hands?  
And so went striding off, on that straight way  
Leads to Larissa and the suburb tomb.  
Gladness be with thee, Helper of our world!  
I think this is the authentic sign and seal  
Of Godship, that it ever waxes glad,  
And more glad, until gladness blossoms, bursts  
Into a rage to suffer for mankind,  
And recommence at sorrow: drops like seed  
After the blossom, ultimate of all.  
Say, does the seed scorn earth and seek the sun?  
Surely it has no other end and aim  
Than to drop, once more die into the ground,  
Taste cold and darkness and oblivion there:  
And thence rise, tree-like grow through pain to joy,  
More joy and most joy,—do man good again.

So, to the struggle off strode Herakles.  
When silence closed behind the lion-garb,  
Back came our dull fact settling in its place,  
Though heartiness and passion half-dispersed  
The inevitable fate. And presently  
In came the mourners from the funeral,  
One after one, until we hoped the last  
Would be Alkestis and so end our dream.  
Could they have really left Alkestis lone  
I' the waywide sepulchre! Home, all save she!  
And when Admetos felt that it was so,  
By the stand-still: when he lifted head and face  
From the two hiding hands and peplos' fold,  
And looked forth, knew the palace, knew the hills,  
Knew the plains, knew the friendly frequency there,  
And no Alkestis any more again,  
Why, the whole woe billow-like broke on him.

'O hateful entry, hateful countenance  
O' the widowed halls!'—he moaned. 'What was to be?  
Go there? Stay here? Speak, not speak? All was now  
Mad and impossible alike; one way  
And only one was sane and safe—to die:  
Now he was made aware how dear is death,  
How lovable the dead are, how the heart  
Yearns in us to go hide where they repose,  
When we find sunbeams do no good to see,  
Nor earth rests rightly where our footsteps fall.  
His wife had been to him the very pledge,  
Sun should be sun, earth—earth; the pledge was robbed,  
Pact broken, and the world was left no world.'  
He stared at the impossible mad life:  
Stood, while they urged 'Advance—advance! Go deep  
Into the utter dark, thy palace-core!'  
They tried what they called comfort, 'touched the quick  
Of the ulceration in his soul,' he said,  
With memories,—'once thy joy was thus and thus!'  
True comfort were to let him fling himself  
Into the hollow grave o' the tomb, and so  
Let him lie dead along with all he loved.

One bade him note that his own family  
Boasted a certain father whose sole son,

Worthy bewailment, died: and yet the sire  
 Bore stoutly up against the blow and lived;  
 For all that he was childless now, and prone  
 Already to grey hairs, far on in life.  
 Could such a good example miss effect?  
 Why fix foot, stand so, staring at the house,  
 Why not go in, as that wise kinsman would?

'Oh that arrangement of the house I know!  
 How can I enter, how inhabit thee  
 Now that one cast of fortune changes all?  
 Oh me, for much divides the then from now!  
 Then—with those pine tree torches, Pelian pomp  
 And marriage-hymns, I entered, holding high  
 The hand of my dear wife; while many-voiced  
 The revelry that followed me and her  
 That 's dead now,—friends felicitating both,  
 As who were lofty-lineaged, each of us  
 Born of the best, two wedded and made one;  
 Now—wail is wedding-chant's antagonist,  
 And, for white peplos, stoles in sable state  
 Herald my way to the deserted couch!'

The one word more they ventured was 'This grief  
 Befell thee witless of what sorrow means,  
 Close after prosperous fortune: but, reflect!  
 Thou hast saved soul and body. Dead, thy wife—  
 Living, the love she left. What 's novel here?  
 Many the man, from whom Death long-ago  
 Loosed the life-partner!'

Then Admetos spoke:  
 Turned on the comfort, with no tears, this time.  
 He was beginning to be like his wife.  
 I told you of that pressure to the point,  
 Word slow pursuing word in monotone,  
 Alkestis spoke with; so Admetos, now,  
 Solemnly bore the burden of the truth.  
 And as the voice of him grew, gathered strength,  
 And groaned on, and persisted to the end,  
 We felt how deep had been descent in grief,  
 And with what change he came up now to light,  
 And left behind such littleness as tears.

'Friends, I account the fortune of my wife  
Happier than mine, though it seem otherwise:  
For, her indeed no grief will ever touch,  
And she from many a labour pauses now,  
Renowned one! Whereas I, who ought not live,  
But do live, by evading destiny,  
Sad life am I to lead, I learn at last!  
For how shall I bear going in-doors here?  
Accosting whom? By whom saluted back,  
Shall I have joyous entry? Whither turn?  
Inside, the solitude will drive me forth,  
When I behold the empty bed—my wife's—  
The seat she used to sit upon, the floor  
Unsprinkled as when dwellers loved the cool,  
The children that will clasp my knees about,  
Cry for their mother back: these servants too  
Moaning for what a guardian they have lost!  
Inside my house such circumstance awaits.  
Outside,—Thessalian people's marriage-feasts  
And gatherings for talk will harass me,  
With overflow of women everywhere;  
It is impossible I look on them—  
Familiars of my wife and just her age!  
And then, whoever is a foe of mine,  
And lights on me—why, this will be his word—  
"See there! alive ignobly, there he skulks  
That played the dastard when it came to die,  
And, giving her he wedded, in exchange,  
Kept himself out of Hades safe and sound,  
The coward! Do you call that creature—man?  
He hates his parents for declining death,  
Just as if he himself would gladly die!"  
This sort of reputation shall I have,  
Beside the other ills enough in store.  
Ill-famed, ill-faring,—what advantage, friends,  
Do you perceive I gain by life for death?'

That was the truth. Vexed waters sank to smooth:  
'T was only when the last of bubbles broke,  
The latest circlet widened all away  
And left a placid level, that up swam  
To the surface the drowned truth, in dreadful change.  
So, through the quiet and submission,—ay,



Spite of some strong words—(for you miss the tone)  
The grief was getting to be infinite—  
Grief, friends fell back before. Their office shrank  
To that old solace of humanity—  
'Being born mortal, bear grief! Why born else?'  
And they could only meditate anew.

'They, too, upborne by airy help of song,  
And haply science, which can find the stars,  
Had searched the heights: had sounded depths as well  
By catching much at books where logic lurked,  
Yet nowhere found they aught could overcome  
Necessity: not any medicine served,  
Which Thrakian tablets treasure, Orphic voice  
Wrote itself down upon: nor remedy  
Which Phoibos gave to the Asklepiadai;  
Cutting the roots of many a virtuous herb  
To solace overburdened mortals. None!  
Of this sole goddess, never may we go  
To altar nor to image: sacrifice  
She hears not. All to pray for is—"Approach!  
But, oh, no harder on me, awful one,  
Than heretofore! Let life endure thee still!  
For, whatsoe'er Zeus' nod decree, that same  
In concert with thee hath accomplishment.  
Iron, the very stuff o' the Chaluboi,  
Thou, by sheer strength, dost conquer and subdue;  
Nor, of that harsh abrupt resolve of thine,  
Any relenting is there!"

'O my king!

Thee also, in the shackles of those hands,  
Not to be shunned, the Goddess grasped! Yet, bear!  
Since never wilt thou lead from underground  
The dead ones, wail thy worst! If mortals die,—  
The very children of immortals, too,  
Dropped mid our darkness, these decay as sure!  
Dear indeed was she while among us: dear,  
Now she is dead, must she for ever be:  
Thy portion was to clasp, within thy couch,  
The noblest of all women as a wife.  
Nor be the tomb of her supposed some heap  
That hides mortality: but like the Gods  
Honoured, a veneration to a world

Of wanderers! Oft the wanderer, struck thereby,  
Who else had sailed past in his merchant-ship,  
Ay, he shall leave ship, land, long wind his way  
Up to the mountain-summit, till there break  
Speech forth "So, this was she, then, died of old  
To save her husband! now, a deity  
She bends above us. Hail, benignant one!  
Give good!" Such voices so will supplicate.

'But—can it be? Alkmené's offspring comes,  
Admetos!—to thy house advances here!'

I doubt not, they supposed him decently  
Dead somewhere in that winter world of Thrace—  
Vanquished by one o' the Bistones, or else  
Victim to some mad steed's voracity—  
For did not friends prognosticate as much?  
It were a new example to the point,  
That 'children of immortals, dropped by stealth  
Into our darkness, die as sure as we!'  
A case to quote and comfort people with:  
But, as for lamentation, ai and pheu,  
Right-minded subjects kept them for their lord.

Ay, he it was advancing! In he strode,  
And took his stand before Admetos,—turned  
Now by despair to such a quietude,  
He neither raised his face nor spoke, this time,  
The while his friend surveyed him steadily.  
That friend looked rough with fighting: had he strained  
Worst brute to breast was ever strangled yet?  
Somehow, a victory—for there stood the strength,  
Happy, as always; something grave, perhaps;  
The great vein-cordage on the fret-worked front,  
Black-swollen, beaded yet with battle-dew  
The yellow hair o' the hero!—his big frame  
A-quiver with each muscle sinking back  
Into the sleepy smooth it leaped from late.  
Under the great guard of one arm, there leant  
A shrouded something, live and woman-like,  
Propped by the heart-beats 'neath the lion-coat.  
When he had finished his survey, it seemed,  
The heavings of the heart began subside,

The helpful breath returned, and last the smile  
Shone out, all Herakles was back again,  
As the words followed the saluting hand.

'To friendly man, behoves we freely speak,  
Admetos!—nor keep buried, deep in breast,  
Blame we leave silent. I assuredly  
Judged myself proper, if I should approach  
By accident calamities of thine,  
To be demonstrably thy friend: but thou  
Told'st me not of the corpse then claiming care,  
That was thy wife's, but didst instal me guest  
I' the house here, as though busied with a grief  
Indeed, but then, mere grief beyond thy gate:  
And so, I crowned my head, and to the Gods  
Poured my libations in thy dwelling-place,  
With such misfortune round me. And I blame—  
Certainly blame thee, having suffered thus!  
But still I would not pain thee, pained enough:  
So let it pass! Wherefore I seek thee now,  
Having turned back again though onward bound,  
That I will tell thee. Take and keep for me  
This woman, till I come thy way again,  
Driving before me, having killed the king  
O' the Bistones, that drove of Thrakian steeds:  
In such case, give the woman back to me!  
But should I fare,—as fare I fain would not,  
Seeing I hope to prosper and return,—  
Then, I bequeath her as thy household slave.  
She came into my hands with good hard toil!  
For, what find I, when started on my course,  
But certain people, a whole country-side,  
Holding a wrestling-bout? as good to me  
As a new labour: whence I took, and here  
Come keeping with me, this, the victor's prize.  
For, such as conquered in the easy work,  
Gained horses which they drove away: and such  
As conquered in the harder,—those who boxed  
And wrestled,—cattle; and, to crown the prize,  
A woman followed. Chancing as I did,  
Base were it to forgo this fame and gain!  
Well, as I said, I trust her to thy care:  
No woman I have kidnapped, understand!

But good hard toil has done it: here I come!  
Some day, who knows? even thou wilt praise the feat!’

Admetos raised his face and eyed the pair:  
Then, hollowly and with submission, spoke,  
And spoke again, and spoke time after time,  
When he perceived the silence of his friend  
Would not be broken by consenting word.  
As a tired slave goes adding stone to stone  
Until he stop some current that molests,  
So poor Admetos piled up argument  
Vainly against the purpose all too plain  
In that great brow acquainted with command.

‘Nowise dishonouring, nor amid my foes  
Ranking thee, did I hide my wife’s ill fate;  
But it were grief superimposed on grief,  
Shouldst thou have hastened to another home.  
My own woe was enough for me to weep!  
But, for this woman,—if it so may be,—  
Bid some Thessalian,—I entreat thee, king!—  
Keep her,—who has not suffered like myself!  
Many of the Pheraioi welcome thee.  
Be no reminder to me of my ills!  
I could not, if I saw her come to live,  
Restrain the tear! Inflict on me diseased  
No new disease: woe bends me down enough!  
Then, where could she be sheltered in my house,  
Female and young too? For that she is young,  
The vesture and adornment prove. Reflect!  
Should such an one inhabit the same roof  
With men? And how, mixed up, a girl, with youths,  
Shall she keep pure, in that case? No light task  
To curb the May-day youngster, Herakles!  
I only speak because of care for thee.  
Or must I, in avoidance of such harm,  
Make her to enter, lead her life within  
The chamber of the dead one, all apart?  
How shall I introduce this other, couch  
This where Alkestis lay? A double blame  
I apprehend: first, from the citizens—  
Lest some tongue of them taunt that I betray  
My benefactress, fall into the snare

Of a new fresh face: then, the dead one's self,—  
Will she not blame me likewise? Worthy, sure,  
Of worship from me! circumspect my ways,  
And jealous of a fault, are bound to be.  
But thou,—O woman, whosoe'er thou art,—  
Know, thou hast all the form, art like as like  
Alkestis, in the bodily shape! Ah me!  
Take,—by the Gods,—this woman from my sight,  
Lest thou undo me, the undone before!  
Since I seem—seeing her—as if I saw  
My own wife! And confusions cloud my heart,  
And from my eyes the springs break forth! Ah me  
Unhappy—how I taste for the first time  
My misery in all its bitterness!'

Whereat the friends conferred: 'The chance, in truth,  
Was an untoward one—none said otherwise.  
Still, what a God comes giving, good or bad,  
That, one should take and bear with. Take her, then!'

Herakles,—not unfastening his hold  
On that same misery, beyond mistake  
Hoarse in the words, convulsive in the face,—  
'I would that I had such a power,' said he,  
'As to lead up into the light again  
Thy very wife, and grant thee such a grace.'

'Well do I know thou wouldst: but where the hope?  
There is no bringing back the dead to light.'

'Be not extravagant in grief, no less!  
Bear it, by augury of better things!'

'T is easier to advise "bear up," than bear!'

'But how carve way i' the life that lies before,  
If bent on groaning ever for the past?'

'I myself know that: but a certain love  
Allures me to the choice I shall not change.'

'Ay, but, still loving dead ones, still makes weep.'

'And let it be so! She has ruined me,  
And still more than I say: that answers all.'

'Oh, thou hast lost a brave wife: who disputes?'

'So brave a one—that he whom thou behold'st  
Will never more enjoy his life again!'

'Time will assuage! The evil yet is young!'

'Time, thou mayst say, will; if time mean—to die.'

'A wife—the longing for new marriage-joys  
Will stop thy sorrow!'

'Hush, friend,—hold thy peace!  
What hast thou said! I could not credit ear!'  
'How then? Thou wilt not marry, then, but keep  
A widowed couch?'

'There is not any one  
Of womankind shall couch with whom thou seest!'

'Dost think to profit thus in any way  
The dead one?'

'Her, wherever she abide,  
My duty is to honour.'

'And I praise—  
Indeed I praise thee! Still, thou hast to pay  
The price of it, in being held a fool!'

'Fool call me—only one name call me not!  
Bridegroom!'

'No: it was praise, I portioned thee,  
Of being good true husband to thy wife!'

'When I betray her, though she is no more,  
May I die!'

And the thing he said was true:  
For out of Herakles a great glow broke.  
There stood a victor worthy of a prize:  
The violet-crown that withers on the brow  
Of the half-hearted claimant. Oh, he knew  
The signs of battle hard fought and well won,  
This queller of the monsters!—knew his friend



Planted firm foot, now, on the loathly thing  
That was Admetos late! 'would die,' he knew,  
Ere let the reptile raise its crest again.  
If that was truth, why try the true friend more?

'Then, since thou canst be faithful to the death,  
Take, deep into thy house, my dame!' smiled he.

'Not so!—I pray, by thy Progenitor!'

'Thou wilt mistake in disobeying me!'

'Obeying thee, I have to break my heart!'

'Obey me! Who knows but the favour done  
May fall into its place as duty too?'

So, he was humble, would decline no more  
Bearing a burden: he just sighed 'Alas!  
Wouldst thou hadst never brought this prize from game!'

'Yet, when I conquered there, thou conqueredst!'

'All excellently urged! Yet—spite of all,  
Bear with me! let the woman go away!'

'She shall go, if needs must: but ere she go,  
See if there *is* need!'

'Need there is! At least,  
Except I make thee angry with me, so!'

'But I persist, because I have my spice  
Of intuition likewise: take the dame!'

'Be thou the victor, then! But certainly  
Thou dost thy friend no pleasure in the act!'

'Oh, time will come when thou shalt praise me! Now—  
Only obey!'

'Then, servants, since my house  
Must needs receive this woman, take her there!'

'I shall not trust this woman to the care  
Of servants.'

'Why, conduct her in, thyself,  
If that seem preferable!'

'I prefer,  
With thy good leave, to place her in thy hands!'

'I would not touch her! Entry to the house—  
That, I concede thee.'

'To thy sole right hand,  
I mean to trust her!'

'King! Thou wrenchest this  
Out of me by main force, if I submit!'

'Courage, friend! Come, stretch hand forth! Good!  
Now touch  
The stranger-woman!'

'There! A hand I stretch—  
As though it meant to cut off Gorgon's head!'

'Hast hold of her?'

'Fast hold.'

'Why, then, hold fast  
And have her! and, one day, asseverate  
Thou wilt, I think, thy friend, the son of Zeus,  
He was the gentle guest to entertain!  
Look at her! See if she, in any way,  
Present thee with resemblance of thy wife!'

Ah, but the tears come, find the words at fault!  
There is no telling how the hero twitched  
The veil off: and there stood, with such fixed eyes  
And such slow smile, Alkestis' silent self!  
It was the crowning grace of that great heart,  
To keep back joy: procrastinate the truth  
Until the wife, who had made proof and found  
The husband wanting, might essay once more,  
Hear, see, and feel him renovated now—  
Able to do, now, all herself had done,  
Risen to the height of her: so, hand in hand,  
The two might go together, live and die.

Beside, when he found speech, you guess the speech.

He could not think he saw his wife again:  
It was some mocking God that used the bliss  
To make him mad! Till Herakles must help:  
Assure him that no spectre mocked at all;  
He was embracing whom he buried once.  
Still,—did he touch, might he address the true,—  
True eye, true body of the true live wife?

And Herakles said, smiling, 'All was truth.  
Spectre? Admetos had not made his guest  
One who played ghost-invoker, or such cheat!  
Oh, he might speak and have response, in time!  
All heart could wish was gained now—life for death:  
Only, the rapture must not grow immense:  
Take care, nor wake the envy of the Gods!'

'Oh thou, of greatest Zeus true son,'—so spoke  
Admetos when the closing word must come,  
'Go ever in a glory of success,  
And save, that sire, his offspring to the end!  
For thou hast—only thou—raised me and mine  
Up again to this light and life!' Then asked  
Tremblingly, how was trod the perilous path  
Out of the dark into the light and life:  
How it had happened with Alkestis there.

And Herakles said little, but enough—  
How he engaged in combat with that king  
O' the dæmons: how the field of contest lay  
By the tomb's self: how he sprang from ambushade,  
Captured Death, caught him in that pair of hands.

But all the time, Alkestis moved not once  
Out of the set gaze and the silent smile;  
And a cold fear ran through Admetos' frame:  
'Why does she stand and front me, silent thus?'

Herakles solemnly replied 'Not yet  
Is it allowable thou hear the things  
She has to tell thee; let vanish quite  
That consecration to the lower Gods,  
And on our upper world the third day rise!  
Lead her in, meanwhile; good and true thou art,

Good, true, remain thou! Practise piety  
To stranger-guests the old way! So, farewell!  
Since forth I fare, fulfil my urgent task  
Set by the king, the son of Sthenelos.'

Fain would Admetos keep that splendid smile  
Ever to light him. 'Stay with us, thou heart!  
Remain our house-friend!'

'At some other day!  
Now, of necessity, I haste!' smiled he.

'But mayst thou prosper, go forth on a foot  
Sure to return! Through all the tetrarchy  
Command my subjects that they institute  
Thanksgiving-dances for the glad event,  
And bid each altar smoke with sacrifice!  
For we are minded to begin a fresh  
Existence, better than the life before;  
Seeing I own myself supremely blest.'

Whereupon all the friendly moralists  
Drew this conclusion: chirped, each beard to each:  
'Manifold are thy shapings, Providence!  
Many a hopeless matter Gods arrange.  
What we expected never came to pass:  
What we did not expect, Gods brought to bear;  
So have things gone, this whole experience through!'

---

Ah, but if you had seen the play itself!  
They say, my poet failed to get the prize:  
Sophokles got the prize,—great name! They say,  
Sophokles also means to make a piece,  
Model a new Admetos, a new wife:  
Success to him! One thing has many sides.  
The great name! But no good supplants a good,  
Nor beauty undoes beauty. Sophokles  
Will carve and carry a fresh cup, brimful  
Of beauty and good, firm to the altar-foot,  
And glorify the Dionusiad shrine:  
Not clash against this crater in the place

Where the God put it when his mouth had drained,  
To the last dregs, libation life-blood-like,  
And praised Euripides for evermore—  
*The Human with his droppings of warm tears.*

Still, since one thing may have so many sides,  
I think I see how,—far from Sophokles,—  
You, I, or any one might mould a new  
Admetos, new Alkestis. Ah, that brave  
Bounty of poets, the one royal race  
That ever was, or will be, in this world!  
They give no gift that bounds itself and ends  
I' the giving and the taking: theirs so breeds  
I' the heart and soul o' the taker, so transmutes  
The man who only was a man before,  
That he grows godlike in his turn, can give—  
He also: share the poets' privilege,  
Bring forth new good, new beauty, from the old.  
As though the cup that gave the wine, gave, too,  
The God's prolific giver of the grape,  
That vine, was wont to find out, fawn around  
His footstep, springing still to bless the dearth,  
At bidding of a Mainad. So with me:  
For I have drunk this poem, quenched my thirst,  
Satisfied heart and soul—yet more remains!  
Could we too make a poem? Try at least,  
Inside the head, what shape the rose-mists take!

When God Apollon took, for punishment,  
A mortal form and sold himself a slave  
To King Admetos till a term should end,—  
Not only did he make, in servitude,  
Such music, while he fed the flocks and herds,  
As saved the pasturage from wrong or fright,  
Curing rough creatures of ungentleness:  
Much more did that melodious wisdom work  
Within the heart o' the master: there, ran wild  
Many a lust and greed that grow to strength  
By preying on the native pity and care,  
Would else, all undisturbed, possess the land.

And these, the God so tamed, with golden tongue,  
That, in the plenitude of youth and power,

Admetos vowed himself to rule thenceforth  
In Pherai solely for his people's sake,  
Subduing to such end each lust and greed  
That dominates the natural charity.

And so the struggle ended. Right ruled might:  
And soft yet brave, and good yet wise, the man  
Stood up to be a monarch; having learned  
The worth of life, life's worth would he bestow  
On all whose lot was cast, to live or die,  
As he determined for the multitude.  
So stands a statue: pedestalled sublime,  
Only that it may wave the thunder off,  
And ward, from winds that vex, a world below.

And then,—as if a whisper found its way  
E'en to the sense o' the marble,—'Vain thy vow!  
The royalty of its resolve, that head  
Shall hide within the dust ere day be done:  
That arm, its outstretch of beneficence,  
Shall have a speedy ending on the earth:  
Lie patient, prone, while light some cricket leaps  
And takes possession of the masterpiece,  
To sit, sing louder as more near the sun.  
For why? A flaw was in the pedestal;  
Who knows? A worm's work! Sapped, the certain fate  
O' the statue is to fall, and thine to die!'

Whereat the monarch, calm, addressed himself  
To die, but bitterly the soul outbroke—  
'O prodigality of life, blind waste  
I' the world, of power profuse without the will  
To make life do its work, deserve its day!  
My ancestors pursued their pleasure, poured  
The blood o' the people out in idle war,  
Or took occasion of some weary peace  
To bid men dig down deep or build up high,  
Spend bone and marrow that the king might feast  
Entrenched and buttressed from the vulgar gaze.  
Yet they all lived, nay, lingered to old age:  
As though Zeus loved that they should laugh to scorn  
The vanity of seeking other ends



In rule than just the ruler's pastime. They  
Lived; I must die.'

And, as some long last moan  
Of a minor suddenly is propped beneath  
By note which, new-struck, turns the wail, that was,  
Into a wonder and a triumph, so  
Began Alkestis: 'Nay, thou art to live!  
The glory that, in the disguise of flesh,  
Was helpful to our house,—he prophesied  
The coming fate: whereon, I pleaded sore  
That he,—I guessed a God, who to his couch  
Amid the clouds must go and come again,  
While we were darkling,—since he loved us both,'  
He should permit thee, at whatever price,  
To live and carry out to heart's content  
Soul's purpose, turn each thought to very deed,  
Nor let Zeus lose the monarch meant in thee.

To which Apollon, with a sunset smile,  
Sadly—'And so should mortals arbitrate!  
It were unseemly if they aped us Gods,  
And, mindful of our chain of consequence,  
Lost care of the immediate earthly link;  
Forwent the comfort of life's little hour,  
In prospect of some cold abysmal blank  
Alien eternity,—unlike the time  
They know, and understand to practise with,—  
No,—our eternity—no heart's blood, bright  
And warm outpoured in its behoof, would tinge  
Never so palely, warm a whit the more:  
Whereas retained and treasured—left to beat  
Joyously on, a life's length, in the breast  
O' the loved and loving—it would throb itself  
Through, and suffuse the earthly tenement,  
Transform it, even as your mansion here  
Is love-transformed into a temple-home  
Where I, a God, forget the Olumpian glow,  
I' the feel of human richness like the rose:  
Your hopes and fears, so blind and yet so sweet  
With death about them. Therefore, well in thee  
To look, not on eternity, but time:  
To apprehend that, should Admetos die,  
All, we Gods purposed in him, dies as sure:

That, life's link snapping, all our chain is lost.  
And yet a mortal glance might pierce, methinks,  
Deeper into the seeming dark of things,  
And learn, no fruit, man's life can bear, will fade:  
Learn, if Admetos die now, so much more  
Will pity for the frailness found in flesh,  
Will terror at the earthly chance and change  
Frustrating wisest scheme of noblest soul,  
Will these go wake the seeds of good asleep  
Throughout the world: as oft a rough wind sheds  
The unripe promise of some field-flower,—true!  
But loosens too the level, and lets breathe  
A thousand captives for the year to come.  
Nevertheless, obtain thy prayer, stay fate!  
Admetos lives—if thou wilt die for him!’

‘So was the pact concluded that I die,  
And thou live on, live for thyself, for me,  
For all the world. Embrace and bid me hail,  
Husband, because I have the victory—  
Am, heart, soul, head to foot, one happiness!’

Whereto Admetos, in a passionate cry,  
‘Never, by that true word Apollon spoke!  
All the unwise wish is unwished, oh wife!  
Let purposes of Zeus fulfil themselves,  
If not through me, then through some other man!  
Still, in myself he had a purpose too,  
Inalienably mine, to end with me:  
This purpose—that, throughout my earthly life,  
Mine should be mingled and made up with thine,—  
And we two prove one force and play one part  
And do one thing. Since death divides the pair,  
’T is well that I depart and thou remain  
Who wast to me as spirit is to flesh:  
Let the flesh perish, be perceived no more,  
So thou, the spirit that informed the flesh,  
Bend yet awhile, a very flame above  
The rift I drop into the darkness by,—  
And bid remember, flesh and spirit once  
Worked in the world, one body, for man's sake.  
Never be that abominable show

Of passive death without a quickening life—  
Admetos only, no Alkestis now!’

Then she: ‘O thou Admetos, must the pile  
Of truth on truth, which needs but one truth more  
To tower up in completeness, trophy-like,  
Emprize of man, and triumph of the world,  
Must it go ever to the ground again  
Because of some faint heart or faltering hand,  
Which we, that breathless world about the base,  
Trusted should carry safe to altitude,  
Superimpose o’ the summit, our supreme  
Achievement, our victorious coping-stone?  
Shall thine, Beloved, prove the hand and heart  
That fail again, flinch backward at the truth  
Would cap and crown the structure this last time,—  
Precipitate our monumental hope  
And strew the earth ignobly yet once more?  
See how, truth piled on truth, the structure wants,  
Waits just the crowning truth I claim of thee!  
Wouldst thou, for any joy to be enjoyed,  
For any sorrow that thou mightst escape,  
Unwill thy will to reign a righteous king?  
Nowise! And were there two lots, death and life,—  
Life, wherein good resolve should go to air,  
Death, whereby finest fancy grew plain fact  
I’ the reign of thy survivor,—life or death?  
Certainly death, thou choosest. Here stand I  
The wedded, the beloved one hadst thou loved  
Her who less worthily could estimate  
Both life and death than thou? Not so should say  
Admetos, whom Apollon made come court  
Alkestis in a car, submissive brutes  
Of blood were yoked to, symbolizing soul  
Must dominate unruly sense in man.  
Then, shall Admetos and Alkestis see  
Good alike, and alike choose, each for each,  
Good,—and yet, each for other, at the last,  
Choose evil? What? thou soundest in my soul  
To depths below the deepest, reachest good  
In evil, that makes evil good again,  
And so allottest to me that I live  
And not die—letting die, not thee alone,

But all true life that lived in both of us?  
Look at me once ere thou decree the lot!

Therewith her whole soul entered into his,  
He looked the look back, and Alkestis died.

And even while it lay, i' the look of him,  
Dead, the dimmed body, bright Alkestis' soul  
Had penetrated through the populace  
Of ghosts, was got to Koré,—throned and crowned  
The pensive queen o' the twilight, where she dwells  
For ever in a muse, but half away  
From flowery earth she lost and hankers for,—  
And there demanded to become a ghost  
Before the time.

Whereat the softened eyes  
Of the lost maidenhood that lingered still  
Straying among the flowers in Sicily,  
Sudden was startled back to Hades' throne  
By that demand: broke through humanity  
Into the orbéd omniscience of a God,  
Searched at a glance Alkestis to the soul,  
And said—while a long slow sigh lost itself  
I' the hard and hollow passage of a laugh:

'Hence, thou deceiver! This is not to die,  
If, by the very death which mocks me now,  
The life, that's left behind and past my power,  
Is formidably doubled. Say, there gfiht  
Two athletes, side by side, each athlete armed  
With only half the weapons, and no more,  
Adequate to a contest with their foe:  
If one of these should fling helm, sword and shield  
To fellow—shieldless, swordless, helmless late—  
And so leap naked o'er the barrier, leave  
A combatant equipped from head to heel,  
Yet cry to the other side "Receive a friend  
Who fights no longer!" "Back, friend, to the fray!"  
Would be the prompt rebuff; I echo it.  
Two souls in one were formidable odds:  
Admetos must not be himself and thou!'

And so, before the embrace relaxed a whit,  
The lost eyes opened, still beneath the look;  
And lo, Alkestis was alive again,  
And of Admetos' rapture who shall speak?

So, the two lived together long and well.  
But never could I learn, by word of scribe  
Or voice of poet, rumour wafts our way,  
That—of the scheme of rule in righteousness,  
The bringing back again the Golden Age,  
Which, rather than renounce, our pair would die—  
That ever one faint particle came true,  
With both alive to bring it to effect:  
Such is the envy Gods still bear mankind!

So might our version of the story prove,  
And no Euripidean pathos plague  
Too much my critic-friend of Syracuse.

'Besides your poem failed to get the prize:  
(That is, the first prize: second prize is none).  
Sophokles got it!' Honour the great name!  
All cannot love two great names; yet some do:  
I know the poetess who graved in gold,  
Among her glories that shall never fade,  
This style and title for Euripides,  
*The Human with his droppings of warm tears.*

I know, too, a great Kaunian painter, strong  
As Herakles, though rosy with a robe  
Of grace that softens down the sinewy strength:  
And he has made a picture of it all.  
There lies Alkestis dead, beneath the sun,  
She longed to look her last upon, beside  
The sea, which somehow tempts the life in us  
To come trip over its white waste of waves,  
And try escape from earth, and fleet as free.  
Behind the body, I suppose there bends  
Old Pheres in his hoary impotence;  
And women-wailers, in a corner crouch  
—Four, beautiful as you four—yes, indeed!—  
Close, each to other, agonizing all,  
As fastened, in fear's rhythmic sympathy,

To two contending opposite. There strains  
The might o' the hero 'gainst his more than match,  
—Death, dreadful not in thew and bone, but like  
The envenomed substance that exudes some dew  
Whereby the merely honest flesh and blood  
Will fester up and run to ruin straight,  
Ere they can close with, clasp and overcome  
The poisonous impalpability  
That simulates a form beneath the flow  
Of those grey garments; I pronounce that piece  
Worthy to set up in our Poikilé!

And all came,—glory of the golden verse,  
And passion of the picture, and that fine  
Frank outgush of the human gratitude  
Which saved our ship and me, in Syracuse,—  
Ay, and the tear or two which slipt perhaps  
Away from you, friends, while I told my tale,  
—It all came of this play that gained no prize!  
Why crown whom Zeus has crowned in soul before?



# ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

INCLUDING

*A TRANSCRIPT FROM EURIPIDES*

BEING THE

*LAST ADVENTURE OF BALAUSTION*

1875

οὐκ ἔσθω κενέβρει· ὅποταν δὲ θύῃς τι, κάλει με

I eat no carrion; when you sacrifice  
Some cleanly creature—call me for a slice!

PERSONS IN THE TRANSCRIBED PLAY OF 'HERAKLES'

AMPHITRUON

IRIS

MEGARA

LUTTA (*Madness*)

LUKOS

*Messenger*

HERAKLES

THESEUS

*Choros of Aged Thebans*

WIND, wave, and bark, bear Euthukles and me,  
Balaustion, from—not sorrow but despair,  
Not memory but the present and its pang!  
Athenai, live thou hearted in my heart:  
Never, while I live, may I see thee more,  
Never again may these repugnant orbs  
Ache themselves blind before the hideous pomp,  
The ghastly mirth which mocked thine overthrow  
—Death's entry, Haides' outrage!

Doomed to die,—

Fire should have flung a passion of embrace  
About thee till, resplendently inarmed,  
(Temple by temple folded to his breast,  
All thy white wonder fainting out in ash)  
Lightly some vaporous sigh of soul escaped,

And so the Immortals bade Athenai back!  
 Or earth might sunder and absorb thee, save,  
 Buried below Olumpos and its gods,  
 Akropolis to dominate her realm  
 For Koré, and console the ghosts; or, sea,  
 What if thy watery plural vastitude,  
 Rolling unanimous advance, had rushed,  
 Might upon might, a moment,—stood, one stare,  
 Sea-face to city-face, thy glaucous wave  
 Glassing that marbled last magnificence,—  
 Till fate's pale tremulous foam-flower tipped the grey,  
 And when wave broke and overswarmed and, sucked  
 To bounds back, multitudinously ceased,  
 Let land again breathe unconfused with sea,  
 Attiké was, Athenai was not now!

Such end I could have borne, for I had shared.  
 But this which, glanced at, aches within my orbs  
 To blinding,—bear me thence, bark, wind and wave!  
 Me, Euthukles, and, hearted in each heart,  
 Athenai, undisgraced as Pallas' self,  
 Bear to my birthplace, Helios' island-bride,  
 Zeus' darling: thither speed us, homeward-bound,  
 Wafted already twelve hours' sail away  
 From horror, nearer by one sunset Rhodes!

Why should despair be? Since, distinct above  
 Man's wickedness and folly, flies the wind  
 And floats the cloud, free transport for our soul  
 Out of its fleshly durance dim and low,—  
 Since disembodied soul anticipates  
 (Thought-borne as now, in rapturous unrestraint)  
 Above all crowding, crystal silentness,  
 Above all noise, a silver solitude:—  
 Surely, where thought so bears soul, soul in time  
 May permanently bide, 'assert the wise,'  
 There live in peace, there work in hope once more—  
 O nothing doubt, Philemon! Greed and strife,  
 Hatred and cark and care, what place have they  
 In yon blue liberality of heaven?  
 How the sea helps! How rose-smit earth will rise  
 Breast-high thence, some bright morning, and be Rhodes!  
 Heaven, earth and sea, my warrant—in their name,

Believe—o'er falsehood, truth is surely sphered,  
O'er ugliness beams beauty, o'er this world  
Extends that realm where, 'as the wise assert,'  
Philemon, thou shalt see Euripides  
Clearer than mortal sense perceived the man!

A sunset nearer Rhodes, by twelve hours' sweep  
Of surge secured from horror? Rather say,  
Quieted out of weakness into strength.  
I dare invite, survey the scene my sense  
Staggered to apprehend: for, disenvolved  
From the mere outside anguish and contempt,  
Slowly a justice centred in a doom  
Reveals itself. Ay, pride succumbed to pride,  
Oppression met the oppressor and was matched.  
Athenai's vaunt braved Sparté's violence  
Till, in the shock, prone fell Peiraios, low  
Rampart and bulwark lay, as,—timing stroke  
Of hammer, axe, and beam hoist, poised and swung,—  
The very flute-girls blew their laughing best,  
In dance about the conqueror while he bade  
Music and merriment help enginery  
Batter down, break to pieces all the trust  
Of citizens once, slaves now. See what walls  
Play substitute for the long double range  
Themistoklean, heralding a guest  
From harbour on to citadel! Each side  
Their senseless walls demolished stone by stone,  
See,—outer wall as stonelike,—heads and hearts,—  
Athenai's terror-stricken populace!  
Prattlers, tongue-tied in crouching abjectness,—  
Braggarts, who wring hands wont to flourish swords—  
Sophist and rhetorician, demagogue,  
(Argument dumb, authority a jest)  
Dikast and heliast, pleader, litigant,  
Quack-priest, sham-prophecy-retailer, scout  
O' the customs, sycophant, whate'er the style,  
Altar-scrap-snatcher, pimp and parasite,—  
Rivalities at truce now each with each,  
Stupefied mud-banks,—such an use they serve!  
While the one order which performs exact  
To promise, functions faithful last as first,  
What is it but the city's lyric troop,

Chantress and psaltress, flute-girl, dancing-girl?  
 Athenai's harlotry takes laughing care  
 Their patron miss no pipings, late she loved,  
 But deathward tread at least the kordax-step.

Die then, who pulled such glory on your heads!  
 There let it grind to powder! Perikles!  
 The living are the dead now: death be life!  
 Why should the sunset yonder waste its wealth?  
 Prove thee Olympian! If my heart supply  
 Inviolatè the structure,—true to type,  
 Build me some spirit-place no flesh shall find,  
 As Pheidias may inspire thee: slab on slab,  
 Renew Athenai, quarry out the cloud,  
 Convert to gold yon west extravagance!  
 'Neath Propylaia, from Akropolis  
 By vapoury grade and grade, gold all the way,  
 Step to thy snow-Pnux, mount thy Bema-cloud,  
 Thunder and lighten thence a Hellas through  
 That shall be better and more beautiful  
 And too august for Sparté's foot to spurn!  
 Chasmed in the crag, again our Theatre  
 Predominates, one purple: Staghunt-month,  
 Brings it not Dionusia? Hail, the Three!  
 Aischulos, Sophokles, Euripides  
 Compete, gain prize or lose prize, godlike still.  
 Nay, lest they lack the old god-exercise—  
 Their noble want the unworthy,—as of old,  
 (How otherwise should patience crown their might?)  
 What if each find his ape promoted man,  
 His censor raised for antic service still?  
 Some new Hermippos to pelt Perikles,  
 Kratinos to swear Pheidias robbed a shrine,  
 Eruxis—I suspect, Euripides,  
 No brow will ache because with mop and mow  
 He gibes my poet! There's a dog-faced dwarf  
 That gets to godship somehow, yet retains  
 His apehood in the Egyptian hierarchy,  
 More decent, indecorous, just enough:  
 Why should not dog-ape, graced in due degree,  
 Grow Momos as thou Zeus? Or didst thou sigh  
 Rightly with thy Makaria? 'After life,  
 Better no sentiency than turbulence;

Death cures the low contention.' Be it so!  
 Yet progress means contention, to my mind.  
 Euthukles, who, except for love that speaks,  
 Art silent by my side while words of mine  
 Provoke that foe from which escape is vain  
 Henceforward, wake Athenai's fate and fall,—  
 Memories asleep as, at the altar-foot  
 Those Furies in the Oresteian song,—  
 Do I amiss who, wanting strength, use craft,  
 Advance upon the foe I cannot fly,  
 Nor feign a snake is dormant though it gnaw?  
 That fate and fall, once bedded in our brain,  
 Roots itself past upwrenching; but coaxed forth,  
 Encouraged out to practise fork and fang,—  
 Perhaps, when satiate with prompt sustenance,  
 It may pine, likelier die than if left swell  
 In peace by our pretension to ignore,  
 Or pricked to threefold fury, should our stamp  
 Bruise and not brain the pest.

A middle course!

What hinders that we treat this tragic theme  
 As the Three taught when either woke some woe,  
 —How Klutaimnestra hated, what the pride  
 Of Iokasté, why Medeia clove  
 Nature asunder. Small rebuked by large,  
 We felt our puny hates refine to air,  
 Our poor prides sink, prevent the humbling hand,  
 Our petty passions purify their tide,  
 So, Euthukles, permit the tragedy  
 To re-enact itself, this voyage through,  
 Till sunsets end and sunrise brighten Rhodes!  
 Majestic on the stage of memory,  
 Peplosed and kothorned, let Athenai fall  
 Once more, nay, oft again till life conclude,  
 Lent for the lesson: Choros, I and thou!  
 What else in life seems piteous any more  
 After such pity, or proves terrible  
 Beside such terror?

Still—since Phrunichos  
 Offended, by too premature a touch  
 Of that Milesian smart-place freshly frayed—  
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(Ah, my poor people, whose prompt remedy  
 Was—fine the poet, not reform thyself!)  
 Beware precipitate approach! Rehearse  
 Rather the prologue, well a year away,  
 Than the main misery, a sunset old.  
 What else but fitting prologue to the piece  
 Style an adventure, stranger than my first  
 By so much as the issue it enwombed  
 Lurked big beyond Balaustion's littleness?  
 Second supreme adventure! O that Spring,  
 That eve I told the earlier to my friends!  
 Where are the four now, with each red-ripe mouth  
 Crumpled so close, no quickest breath it fetched  
 Could disengage the lip-flower furled to bud  
 For fear Admetos,—shivering head and foot,  
 As with sick soul and blind averted face  
 He trusted hand forth to obey his friend,—  
 Should find no wife in her cold hand's response,  
 Nor see the disenshrouded statue start  
 Alkestis, live the life and love the love!  
 I wonder, does the streamlet ripple still,  
 Outsmoothing galingale and watermint  
 Its mat-floor? while at brim, 'twixt sedge and sedge,  
 What bubblings past Baccheion, broadened much,  
 Pricked by the reed and fretted by the fly,  
 Oared by the boatman-spider's pair of arms!  
 Lenaia was a gladsome month ago—  
 Euripides had taught 'Andromédé':  
 Next month, would teach 'Kresphontes'—which same  
 month

Someone from Phokis, who companioned me  
 Since all that happened on those temple-steps,  
 Would marry me and turn Athenian too.  
 Now! if next year the masters let the slaves  
 Do Bacchic service and restore mankind  
 That trilogy whereof, 't is noised, one play  
 Presents the Bacchai,—no Euripides  
 Will teach the choros, nor shall we be tinged  
 By any such grand sunset of his soul,  
 Exiles from dead Athenai,—not the live  
 That's in the cloud there with the new-born star!

Speak to the infinite intelligence,



Sing to the everlasting sympathy!  
Winds belly sail, and drench of dancing brine  
Buffet our boat-side, so the prore bound free!  
Condense our voyage into one great day  
Made up of sunset-closes: eve by eve,  
Resume that memorable night-discourse  
When,—like some meteor-brilliance, fire and filth,  
Or say, his own Amphitheos, deity  
And dung, who, bound on the gods' embassy,  
Got men's acknowledgment in kick and cuff—  
We made acquaintance with a visitor  
Ominous, apparitional, who went  
Strange as he came, but shall not pass away.  
Let us attempt that memorable talk,  
Clothe the adventure's every incident  
With due expression: may not looks be told,  
Gesture made speak, and speech so amplified  
That words find blood-warmth which, cold-writ, they  
lose?

Recall the night we heard the news from Thrace.  
One year ago, Athenai still herself.

We two were sitting silent in the house,  
Yet cheerless hardly. Euthukles, forgive!  
I somehow speak to unseen auditors.  
Not *you*, but—Euthukles had entered, grave,  
Grand, may I say, as who brings laurel-branch  
And message from the tripod: such it proved.

He first removed the garland from his brow,  
Then took my hand and looked into my face.

'Speak good words!' much misgiving faltered I.

'Good words, the best, Balaustion! He is crowned,  
Gone with his Attic ivy home to feast,  
Since Aischulos required companionship.  
Pour a libation for Euripides!'

When we had sat the heavier silence out—  
'Dead and triumphant still!' began reply  
To my eye's question. 'As he willed he worked:

And, as he worked, he wanted, not be sure,  
Triumph his whole life through, submitting work  
To work's right judges, never to the wrong—  
To competency, not ineptitude.  
When he had run life's proper race and worked  
Quite to the stade's end, there remained to try  
The stade's turn, should strength dare the double course.  
Half the diaulos reached, the hundred plays  
Accomplished, force in its rebound sufficed  
To lift along the athlete and ensure  
A second wreath, proposed by fools for first,  
The statist's olive as the poet's bay.  
Wiselier, he suffered not a twofold aim  
Retard his pace, confuse his sight; at once  
Poet and statist; though the multitude  
Girded him ever "All thine aim thine art?  
The idle poet only? No regard  
For civic duty, public service, here?  
We drop our ballot-bean for Sophokles!  
Not only could he write 'Antigoné,'  
But—since (we argued) whoso penned that piece  
Might just as well conduct a squadron,—straight  
Good-naturedly he took on him command,  
Got laughed at, and went back to making plays,  
Having allowed us our experiment  
Respecting the fit use of faculty."  
No whit the more did athlete slacken pace.  
Soon the jeers grew: "Cold hater of his kind,  
A sea-cave suits him, not the vulgar hearth!  
What need of tongue-talk, with a bookish store  
Would stock ten cities?" Shadow of an ass!  
No whit the worse did athlete touch the mark  
And, at the turning-point, consign his scorn  
O' the scorers to that final trilogy  
"Hupsipule," "Phoinissai," and the Match  
Of Life Contemplative with Active Life,  
Zethos against Amphion. Ended so?  
Nowise!—began again; for heroes rest  
Dropping shield's oval o'er the entire man,  
And he who thus took Contemplation's prize  
Turned stade-point but to face Activity.  
Out of all shadowy hands extending help  
For life's decline pledged to youth's labour still,

Whatever renovation flatter age,—  
 Society with pastime, solitude  
 With peace,—he chose the hand that gave the heart,  
 Bade Macedonian Archelaos take  
 The leavings of Athenai, ash once flame.  
 For fifty politicians' frosty work,  
 One poet's ash proved ample and to spare:  
 He propped the state and filled the treasury,  
 Counsell'd the king as might a meaner soul,  
 Furnished the friend with what shall stand in stead  
 Of crown and sceptre, star his name about  
 When these are dust; for him, Euripides  
 Last the old hand on the old phorminx flung,  
 Clashed thence "Alkaion," maddened "Pentheus" up;  
 Then music sighed itself away, one moan  
 Iphigeneia made by Aulis' strand;  
 With her and music died Euripides.

'The poet-friend who followed him to Thrace,  
 Agathon, writes thus much: the merchant-ship  
 Moreover brings a message from the king  
 To young Euripides, who went on board  
 This morning at Mounuchia: all is true.'

I said 'Thank Zeus for the great news and good!'

'Nay, the report is running in brief fire  
 Through the town's stubbly furrow,' he resumed:  
 —'Entertains brightly what their favourite styles  
 "The City of Gapers" for a week perhaps,  
 Supplants three luminous tales, but yesterday  
 Pronounced sufficient lamps to last the month:  
 How Glauketes, outbidding Morsimos,  
 Paid market-price for one Kopaic eel  
 A thousand drachmai, and then cooked his prize  
 Not proper conger-fashion but in oil  
 And nettles, as man fries the foam-fish kind;  
 How all the captains of the triremes, late  
 Victors at Arginousai, on return  
 Will, for reward, be straightway put to death;  
 How Mikon wagered a Thessalian mime  
 Trained him by Lais, looked on as complete,  
 Against Leogoras' blood-mare koppa-marked,

Valued six talents,—swore, accomplished so,  
 The girl could swallow at a draught, nor breathe,  
 A choinix of unmixed Mendesian wine;  
 And having lost the match will—dine on herbs!  
 Three stories late a-flame, at once extinct,  
 Outblazed by just "Euripides is dead"!

'I met the concourse from the Theatre,  
 The audience flocking homeward: victory  
 Again awarded Aristophanes  
 Precisely for his old play chopped and changed  
 "The Female Celebrators of the Feast"—  
 That Thesmophoria, tried a second time.  
 "Never such full success!"—assured the folk,  
 Who yet stopped praising to have word of mouth  
 With "Euthukles, the bard's own intimate,  
 Balaustion's husband, the right man to ask."

"Dead, yes, but how dead, may acquaintance know?  
 You were the couple constant at his cave:  
 Tell us now, is it true that women, moved  
 By reason of his liking Krateros . . ."

'I answered "He was loved by Sokrates."

"Nay," said another, "envy did the work!  
 For, emulating poets of the place,  
 One Arridaios, one Krateues, both  
 Established in the royal favour, these . . ."

'Protagoras instructed him,' said I.

"Phu," whistled Comic Platon, "hear the fact!  
 'T was well said of your friend by Sophokles  
 'He hate our women? In his verse, belike:  
 But when it comes to prose-work,—ha, ha, ha!'  
 New climes don't change old manners: so, it chanced,  
 Pursuing an intrigue one moonless night  
 With Arethousian Nikodikos' wife,  
 (Come now, his years were simply seventy-five)  
 Crossing the palace-court, what haps he on  
 But Archelaos' pack of hungry hounds?  
 Who tore him piecemeal ere his cry brought help."

'I asked: Did not you write "The Festivals"?  
You best know what dog tore him when alive.  
You others, who now make a ring to hear,  
Have not you just enjoyed a second treat,  
Proclaimed that ne'er was play more worthy prize  
Than this, myself assisted at, last year,  
And gave its worth to,—spitting on the same?  
Appraise no poetry,—price cuttlefish,  
Or that seaweed-alphestes, scorpion-sort,  
Much famed for mixing mud with fantasy  
On midnights! I interpret no foul dreams.'

If so said Euthukles, so could not I,  
Balaustion, say. After 'Lusistraté'  
No more for me of 'people's privilege,'  
No witnessing 'the Grand old Comedy  
Coëval with our freedom, which, curtailed,  
Were freedom's deathblow: relic of the past,  
When Virtue laughingly told truth to Vice,  
Uncensured, since the stern mouth, stuffed with flowers,  
Through poetry breathed satire, perfumed blast  
Which sense snuffed up while searched unto the bone!'  
I was a stranger: 'For first joy,' urged friends,  
'Go hear our Comedy, some patriot price  
That plies the selfish advocates of war  
With argument so unevadable  
That crash fall Kleons whom the finer play  
Of reason, tickling, deeper wounds no whit  
Than would a spear-thrust from a savory-stalk!  
No: you hear knave and fool told crime and fault,  
And see each scourged his quantity of stripes.  
"Rough dealing, awkward language," whine our fops:  
The world's too squeamish now to bear plain words  
Concerning deeds it acts with gust enough:  
But, thanks to wine-lees and democracy,  
We've still our stage where truth calls spade a spade!  
Ashamed? Phuromachos' decree provides  
The sex may sit discreetly, witness all,  
Sorted, the good with good, the gay with gay,  
Themselves unseen, no need to force a blush.  
A Rhodian wife and ignorant so long?  
Go hear next play!'

I heard 'Lusistraté.'

Waves, said to wash pollution from the world,  
Take that plague-memory, cure that pustule caught  
As, past escape, I sat and saw the piece  
By one appalled at Phaidra's fate,—the chaste,  
Whom, because chaste, the wicked goddess chained  
To that same serpent of unchastity  
She loathed most, and who, coiled so, died distraught  
Rather than make submission, loose one limb  
Love-wards, at lambency of honeyed tongue,  
Or torture of the scales which scraped her snow  
—I say, the piece by him who charged this piece  
(Because Euripides shrank not to teach,  
If gods be strong and wicked, man, though weak,  
May prove their match by willing to be good)  
With infamies the Scythian's whip should cure—  
'Such outrage done the public—Phaidra named!  
Such purpose to corrupt ingenuous youth,  
Such insult cast on female character!'—  
Why, when I saw that bestiality—  
So beyond all brute-beast imagining,  
That when, to point the moral at the close,  
Poor Salabaccho, just to show how fair  
Was 'Reconciliation,' stripped her charms  
That exhibition simple bade us breathe,  
Seemed something healthy and commendable  
After obscenity grotesqued so much  
It slunk away revolted at itself.  
Henceforth I had my answer when our sage  
Pattern-proposing seniors pleaded grave  
'You fail to fathom here the deep design!  
All's acted in the interest of truth,  
Religion, and those manners old and dear  
Which made our city great when citizens  
Like Aristеides and like Miltiades  
Wore each a golden tettix in his hair.'  
What do they wear now under—Kleophon?  
Well, for such reasons,—I am out of breath,  
But loathsomeness we needs must hurry past,—  
I did not go to see, nor then nor now,  
The 'Thesmophoriazousai.' But, since males  
Choose to brave first, blame afterward, nor brand  
Without fair taste of what they stigmatize,



Euthukles had not missed the first display,  
 Original portrait of Euripides  
 By 'Virtue laughingly reproving Vice':  
 'Virtue,'—the author, Aristophanes,  
 Who mixed an image out of his own depths,  
 Ticketed as I tell you. Oh, this time  
 No more pretension to recondite worth!  
 No joke in aid of Peace, no demagogue  
 Pun-pelleted from Pnux, no kordax-dance  
 Overt helped covertly the Ancient Faith!  
 All now was muck, home-produce, honestman  
 The author's soul secreted to a play  
 Which gained the prize that day we heard the death.

I thought 'How thoroughly death alters things!  
 Where is the wrong now, done our dead and great?  
 How natural seems grandeur in relief,  
 Cliff-base with frothy spites against its calm!'

Euthukles interposed—he read my thought—  
 'O'er them, too, in a moment came the change.  
 The crowd's enthusiastic, to a man:  
 Since, rake as such may please the ordure-heap  
 Because of certain sparkles presumed ore,  
 At first flash of true lightning overhead,  
 They look up, nor resume their search too soon.  
 The insect-scattering sign is evident,  
 And nowhere winks a fire-fly rival now,  
 Nor bustles any beetle of the brood  
 With trundled dung-ball meant to menace heaven.  
 Contrariwise, the cry is "Honour him!"  
 "A statue in the theatre!" wants one;  
 Another "Bring the poet's body back,  
 Bury him in Peiraios: o'er his tomb  
 Let Alkamenes carve the music-witch,  
 The songstress-seiren, meed of melody:  
 Thoukudides invent his epitaph!"  
 To-night the whole town pays its tribute thus.'

Our tribute should not be the same, my friend!  
 Statue? Within our heart he stood, he stands!  
 As for the vest outgrown now by the form,  
 Low flesh that clothed high soul,—a vesture's fate—  
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Why, let it fade, mix with the elements  
 There where it, falling, freed Euripides!  
 But for the soul that 's tutelary now  
 Till time end, o'er the world to teach and bless—  
 How better hail its freedom than by first  
 Singing, we two, its own song back again,  
 Up to that face from which flowed beauty—face  
 Now abler to see triumph and take love  
 Than when it glorified Athenai once?

The sweet and strange Alkestis, which saved me,  
 Secured me—you, ends nowise, to my mind,  
 In pardon of Admetos. Hearts are fain  
 To follow cheerful weary Herakles  
 Striding away from the huge gratitude,  
 Club shouldered, lion-fleece round loin and flank,  
 Bound on the next new labour 'height o'er height  
 Ever surmounting,—destiny's decree!'   
 Thither He helps us: that 's the story's end;  
 He smiling said so, when I told him mine—  
 My great adventure, how Alkestis helped.  
 Afterward, when the time for parting fell,  
 He gave me, with two other precious gifts,  
 This third and best, consummating the grace  
 'Herakles,' writ by his own hand, each line.

'If it have worth, reward is still to seek.  
 Somebody, I forget who, gained the prize  
 And proved arch-poet: time must show!' he smiled:  
 'Take this, and, when the noise tires out, judge me—  
 Some day, not slow to dawn, when somebody—  
 Who? I forget—proves nobody at all!'

Is not that day come? What if you and I  
 Re-sing the song, inaugurate the fame?  
 We have not waited to acquaint ourselves  
 With song and subject; we can prologuize  
 How, at Eurustheus' bidding,—hate strained hard,—  
 Herakles had departed, one time more,  
 On his last labour, worst of all the twelve;  
 Descended into Haides, thence to drag  
 The triple-headed hound, which sun should see  
 Spite of the god whose darkness whelped the Fear.

Down went the hero, 'back—how should he come?'  
 So laughed King Lukos, an old enemy,  
 Who judged that absence testified defeat  
 Of the land's loved one,—since he saved the land  
 And for that service wedded Megara  
 Daughter of Thebai, realm her child should rule.  
 Ambition, greed and malice seized their prey,  
 The Heracleian House, defenceless left,  
 Father and wife and child, to trample out  
 Trace of its hearth-fire: since extreme old age  
 Wakes pity, woman's wrong wins championship,  
 And child may grow up man and take revenge.  
 Hence see we that, from out their palace-home  
 Hunted, for last resource they cluster now  
 Couched on the cold ground, hapless supplicants  
 About their courtyard altar,—Household Zeus  
 It is, the Three in funeral garb beseech,  
 Delaying death so, till deliverance come—  
 When did it ever?—from the deep and dark.  
 And thus breaks silence old Amphitruon's voice. . . .  
 Say I not true thus far, my Euthukles?

Suddenly, torch-light! knocking at the door,  
 Loud, quick, 'Admittance for the revels' lord!  
 Some unintelligible Komos-cry—  
*Raw-flesh red, no cap upon his head,*  
*Dionusos, Bacchos, Phales, Iacchos,*  
*In let him reel with the kid-skin at his heel,*  
*Where it buries in the spread of the bushy myrtle-bed!*  
 (Our Rhodian Jackdaw-song was sense to that!)  
 Then laughter, outbursts ruder and more rude,  
 Through which, with silver point, a fluting pierced,  
 And ever 'Open, open, Bacchos bids!'

But at last—one authoritative word,  
 One name of an immense significance:  
 For Euthukles rose up, threw wide the door.  
 There trooped the Choros of the Comedy  
 Crowned and triumphant; first, those flushed Fifteen  
 Men that wore women's garb, grotesque disguise.  
 Then marched the Three,—who played Mnesilochos,  
 Who, Toxotes, and who, robed right, masked rare,

Monkeyed our Great and Dead to heart's content  
That morning in Athenai. Masks were down  
And robes doffed now; the sole disguise was drink.

Mixing with these—I know not what gay crowd,  
Girl-dancers, flute-boys, and pre-eminent  
Among them,—doubtless draped with such reserve  
As stopped fear of the fifty-drachma fine  
(Beside one's name on public fig-tree nailed)  
Which women pay who in the streets walk bare,—  
Behold Elaphion of the Persic dance!  
Who lately had frisked fawn-foot, and the rest,  
—All for the Patriot Cause, the Antique Faith,  
The Conservation of True Poesy—  
Could I but penetrate the deep design!  
Elaphion, more Peiraios-known as 'Phaps,'  
Tripped at the head of the whole banquet-band  
Who came in front now, as the first fell back;  
And foremost—the authoritative voice,  
The revels-leader, he who gained the prize,  
And got the glory of the Archon's feast—  
There stood in person Aristophanes.

And no ignoble presence! On the bulge  
Of the clear baldness,—all his head one brow,—  
True, the veins swelled, blue network, and there surged  
A red from cheek to temple,—then retired  
As if the dark-leaved chaplet damped a flame,—  
Was never nursed by temperance or health.  
But huge the eyeballs rolled back native fire,  
Imperiously triumphant: nostrils wide  
Waited their incense; while the pursed mouth's pout  
Aggressive, while the beak supreme above,  
While the head, face, nay, pillared throat thrown back  
Beard whitening under like a vinous foam,  
These made a glory, of such insolence—  
I thought,—such domineering deity  
Hephaistos might have carved to cut the brine  
For his gay brother's prow, imbrue that path  
Which, purpling, recognized the conqueror.  
Impudent and majestic: drunk, perhaps,  
But that 's religion; sense too plainly snuffed:  
Still, sensuality was grown a rite.

What I had disbelieved most proved most true.  
 There was a mind here, mind a-wantoning  
 At ease of undisputed mastery  
 Over the body's brood, those appetites.  
 Oh but he grasped them grandly, as the god  
 His either struggling handful,—hurtless snakes  
 Held deep down, strained hard off from side and side!  
 Mastery his, theirs simply servitude,  
 So well could firm fist help intrepid eye.  
 Fawning and fulsome, had they licked and hissed?  
 At mandate of one muscle, order reigned.  
 They had been wreathing much familiar now  
 About him on his entry; but a squeeze  
 Choked down the pests to place: their lord stood free.

Forward he stepped: I rose and fronted him.

'Hail, house, the friendly to Euripides!'  
 (So he began) 'Hail, each inhabitant!  
 You, lady? What, the Rhodian? Form and face.  
 Victory's self upsoaring to receive  
 The poet? Right they named you . . . some rich name.  
 Vowel-buds thorned about with consonants.  
 Fragrant, felicitous, rose-glow enriched  
 By the Isle's unguent: some diminished end  
 In *ion*, Kallistion? delicater still,  
 Kubelion or Melittion,—or, suppose  
 (Less vulgar love than bee or violet)  
 Phibalion, for the mouth split red fig-wise,  
 Korakinidion for the coal-black hair,  
 Nettarion, Phabion for the darlingness?  
 But no, it was some fruit-flower, Rhoidion . . . ha,  
 We near the balsam-bloom—Balaustion! Thanks,  
 Rhodes! Folk have called me Rhodian, do you know?  
 Not fools so far! Because, if Helios wived,  
 As Pindaros sings somewhere prettily,  
 Here blooms his offspring, earth-flesh with sun-fire,  
 Rhodes' blood and Helios' gold. My phorminx, boy!  
 Why does the boy hang back and baulk an ode  
 Tiptoe at spread of wing? But like enough,  
 Sunshine frays torchlight. Witness whom you scare,  
 Superb Balaustion! Look outside the house!  
*Pho*, you have quenched my Komos by first frown

Struck dead all joyance: not a fluting puffs  
 From idle cheekband! Ah, my Choros too?  
 You 've eaten cuckoo-apple? Dumb, you dogs?  
 So much good Thasian wasted on your throats  
 And out of them not one *Threttanelo*?  
*Neblaretai*! Because this earth-and-sun  
 Product looks wormwood and all bitter herbs?  
 Well, do I blench, though me she hates the most  
 Of mortals? By the cabbage, off they slink!  
 You, too, my Chrusomelolonthion-Phaps,  
 Girl-goldling-beetle-beauty? You, abashed,  
 Who late, supremely unabashable,  
 Propped up my play at that important point  
 When Artamouxia tricks the Toxotes?  
 Ha, ha,—thank Hermes for the lucky throw,—  
 We came last comedy of the whole seven,  
 So went all fresh to judgment well-disposed  
 For who should fatly feast them, eye and ear,  
 We two between us! What, you fail your friend?  
 Away then, free me of your cowardice!  
 Go, get you the goat's breakfast! Fare afield,  
 Ye circumcised of Egypt, pigs to sow,  
 Back to the Priest's or forward to the crows,  
 So you but rid me of such company!  
 Once left alone, I can protect myself  
 From statuesque Balaustion pedestalled  
 On much disapprobation and mistake!  
 She dares not beat the sacred brow, beside!  
 Bacchos' equipment, ivy safeguards well  
 As Phoibos' bay.

‘They take me at my word!  
 One comfort is, I shall not want them long,  
 The Archon's cry creaks, creaks, “Curtail expense!  
 The war wants money, year the twenty-sixth!  
 Cut down our Choros number, clip costume,  
 Save birds' wings, beetles' armour, spend the cash  
 In three-crest skull-caps, three days' salt-fish-slice,  
 Three-banked-ships for these sham-ambassadors,  
 And what not: any cost but Comedy's!  
 “No Choros”—soon will follow; what care I?  
 Archinos and Agurhios, scrape your flint,  
 Flay your dead dog, and curry favour so!



Choros in rags, with loss of leather next,  
We lose the boys' vote, lose the song and dance,  
Lose my Elaphion! Still, the actor stays.  
Save but my acting, and the baldhead bard  
Kudathenaian and Pandionid,  
Son of Philippos, Aristophanes  
Surmounts his rivals now as heretofore,  
Though stinted to mere sober prosy verse—  
"Manners and men," so squeamish gets the world!  
No more "Step forward, strip for anapæsts!"  
No calling naughty people by their names,  
No tickling audience into gratitude  
With chickpease, barleygroats and nuts and plums,  
No setting Salabaccho . . .'

As I turned—

'True, lady, I am tolerably drunk:  
The proper inspiration! Otherwise,—  
Phrunichos, Choirilos!—had Aischulos  
So foiled you at the goat-song? Drink 's a god.  
How else did that old doating driveller  
Kratinos foil me, match my masterpiece  
The 'Clouds'? I swallowed cloud-distilment—dew  
Undimmed by any grape-blush, knit my brow  
And gnawed my style and laughed my learnedest;  
While he worked at his "Willow-wicker-flask,"  
Swigging at that same flask by which he swore,  
Till, sing and empty, sing and fill again,  
Somehow result was—what it should not be  
Next time, I promised him and kept my word!  
Hence, brimful now of Thasian . . . I'll be bound,  
Mendesian, merely: triumph-night, you know,  
The High Priest entertains the conqueror,  
And, since war worsens all things, stingily  
The rascal starves whom he is bound to stuff,  
Choros and actors and their lord and king  
The poet; supper, still he needs must spread—  
And this time all was conscientious fare:  
He knew his man, his match, his master—made  
Amends, spared neither fish, flesh, fowl nor wine:  
So merriment increased, I promise you,  
Till—something happened.'

Here he strangely paused.

'After that,—well, it either was the cup  
To the Good Genius, our concluding pledge,  
That wrought me mischief, decently unmixed,—  
Or, what if, when *that* happened, need arose  
Of new libation? Did you only know  
What happened! Little wonder I am drunk.'

Euthukles, o'er the boat-side, quick, what change,  
Watch, in the water! But a second since,  
It laughed a ripply spread of sun and sea,  
Ray fused with wave, to never disunite.  
Now, sudden all the surface, hard and black,  
Lies a quenched light, dead motion: what the cause?  
Look up and lo, the menace of a cloud  
Has solemnized the sparkling, spoiled the sport!  
Just so, some overshadow, some new care  
Stopped all the mirth and mocking on his face  
And left there only such a dark surmise  
—No wonder if the revel disappeared,  
So did his face shed silence every side!  
I recognized a new man fronting me.

'So!' he smiled, piercing to my thought at once,  
'You see myself? Balaustion's fixed regard  
Can strip the proper Aristophanes  
Of what our sophists, in their jargon, style  
His accidents? My soul sped forth but now  
To meet your hostile survey,—soul unseen,  
Yet veritably cinct for soul-defence  
With satyr sportive quips, cranks, boss and spike,  
Just as my visible body paced the street,  
Environed by a boon companionship  
Your apparition also puts to flight.  
Well, what care I if, unaccoutred twice,  
I front my foe—no comicality  
Round soul, and bodyguard in banishment?  
Thank your eyes' searching undisguised I stand:  
The merest female child may question me.  
Spare not, speak bold, Balaustion!'

I did speak

'Bold speech be—welcome to this honoured hearth,  
Good Genius! Glory of the poet, glow  
O' the humourist who castigates his kind,  
Suave summer-lightning lambency which plays  
On stag-horned tree, misshapen crag askew,  
Then vanishes with unvindictive smile  
After a moment's laying black earth bare.  
Splendour of wit that springs a thunderball—  
Satire—to burn and purify the world,  
True aim, fair purpose: just wit justly strikes  
Injustice,—right, as rightly quells the wrong,  
Finds out in knaves', fools', cowards' armoury  
The tricky tinselled place fire flashes through,  
No damage else, sagacious of true ore;  
Wit, learned in the laurel, leaves each wreath  
O'er lyric shell or tragic barbiton,—  
Though alien gauds be singed,—undesecrate,  
The genuine solace of the sacred brow.  
Ay, and how pulses flame a patriot-star  
Steadfast athwart our country's night of things,  
To beacon, would she trust no meteor-blaze,  
Athenai from the rock she steers for straight!  
O light, light, light, I hail light everywhere,  
No matter for the murk that was,—perchance,  
That will be,—certes, never should have been  
Such orb's associate!

'Aristophanes!

"The merest female child may question you?"  
Once, in my Rhodes, a portent of the wave  
Appalled our coast: for many a darkened day,  
Intolerable mystery and fear.  
Who snatched a furtive glance through crannied peak.  
Could but report of snake-scale, lizard-limb,—  
So swam what, making whirlpools as it went,  
Madded the brine with wrath or monstrous sport.  
"T is Tuphon, loose, unmanacled from mount,"  
Declared the priests, "no way appeasable  
Unless perchance by virgin-sacrifice!"  
Thus grew the terror and o'erhung the doom—  
Until one eve a certain female-child  
Strayed in safe ignorance to seacoast edge,  
And there sat down and sang to please herself.

When all at once, large-looming from his wave,  
 Out leaned, chin hand-propped, pensive on the ledge,  
 A sea-worn face, sad as mortality,  
 Divine with yearning after fellowship.  
 He rose but breast-high. So much god she saw;  
 So much she sees now, and does reverence!'

Ah, but there followed tail-splash, frisk of fin!  
 Let cloud pass, the sea's ready laugh outbreaks.  
 No very godlike trace retained the mouth  
 Which mocked with—

'So, He taught you tragedy!

I always asked "Why may not women act?"  
 Nay, wear the comic visor just as well;  
 Or, better, quite cast off the face-disguise  
 And voice-distortion, simply look and speak,  
 Real women playing women as men—men!  
 I shall not wonder if things come to that,  
 Some day when I am distant far enough.  
 Do you conceive the quite new Comedy  
 When laws allow? laws only let girls dance,  
 Pipe, posture,—above all, Elaphionize,  
 Provided they keep decent—that is, dumb.  
 Ay, and, conceiving, I would execute,  
 Had I but two lives: one were overworked!  
 How penetrate encrusted prejudice,  
 Pierce ignorance three generations thick  
 Since first Sousarion crossed our boundary?  
 He battered with a big Megaric stone;  
 Chionides felled oak and rough-hewed thence  
 This club I wield now, having spent my life  
 In planing knobs and sticking studs to shine;  
 Somebody else must try mere polished steel!'

Emboldened by the sober mood's return,  
 'Meanwhile,' said I, 'since planed and studded club  
 Once more has pashed competitors to dust,  
 And poet proves triumphant with that play  
 Euthukles found last year unfortunate,—  
 Does triumph spring from smoothness still more  
 smoothed,  
 Fresh studs sown thick and threefold? In plain words,

Have you exchanged brute-blows,—which teach the  
brute

Man may surpass him in brutality,—  
For human fighting, or true god-like force  
Which breathes persuasion nor needs fight at all?  
Have you essayed attacking ignorance,  
Convicting folly, by their opposites,  
Knowledge and wisdom? not by yours for ours,  
Fresh ignorance and folly, new for old,  
Greater for less, your crime, for our mistake!  
If so success at last have crowned desert,  
Bringing surprise (dashed haply by concern  
At your discovery such wild waste of strength  
—And what strength!—went so long to keep in vogue  
Such warfare—and what warfare!—shamed so fast,  
So soon made obsolete, as fell their foe  
By the first arrow native to the orb,  
First onslaught worthy Aristophanes)—  
Was this conviction's entry that same strange  
“Something that happened” to confound your feast?’

‘Ah, did he witness then my play that failed,  
First “Thesmophoriazousai”? Well and good!  
But did he also see,—your Euthukles,—  
My “Grasshoppers” which followed and failed too,  
Three months since, at the “Little-in-the-Fields”?’

‘To say that he did see that First—should say  
He never cared to see its following.’

‘There happens to be reason why I wrote  
First play and second also. Ask the cause!  
I warrant you receive ere talk be done,  
Fit answer, authorizing either act.  
But here 's the point: as Euthukles made vow  
Never again to taste my quality,  
So I was minded next experiment  
Should tickle palate—yea, of Euthukles!  
Not by such utter change, such absolute  
A topsyturvy of stage-habitude  
As you and he want,—Comedy built fresh,  
By novel brick and mortar, base to roof,—  
No, for I stand too near and look too close!

Pleasure and pastime yours, spectators brave,  
 Should I turn art's fixed fabric upside down!  
 Little you guess how such tough work tasks soul!  
 Not overtasks, though: give fit strength fair play,  
 And strength 's a demiourgos! Art renewed?  
 Ay, in some closet where strength shuts out—first  
 The friendly faces, sympathetic cheer:  
 "More of the old provision none supplies  
 So bounteously as thou,—our love, our pride,  
 Our author of the many a perfect piece!  
 Stick to that standard, change were decadence!"  
 Next, the unfriendly: "This time, strain will tire,  
 He 's fresh, Ameipsias thy antagonist!"  
 —Or better, in some Salaminian cave  
 Where sky and sea and solitude make earth  
 And man and noise one insignificance,  
 Let strength propose itself,—behind the world,—  
 Sole prize worth winning, work that satisfies  
 Strength it has dared and done strength's uttermost!  
 After which,—clap-to closet and quit cave,—  
 Strength may conclude in Archelaos' court,  
 And yet esteem the silken company  
 So much sky-scud, sea-froth, earth-thistledown,  
 For aught their praise or blame should joy or grieve.  
 Strength amid crowds as late in solitude  
 May lead the still life, ply the wordless task:  
 Then only, when seems need to move or speak,  
 Moving—for due respect, when statesmen pass,  
 (Strength, in the closet, watched how spiders spin)  
 Speaking—when fashion shows intelligence,  
 (Strength, in the cave, oft whistled to the gulls)  
 In short, has learnt first, practised afterwards!  
 Despise the world and reverence yourself,—  
 Why, you may unmake things and remake things,  
 And throw behind you, unconcerned enough,  
 What 's made or marred: "you teach men, are not  
 taught!"  
 So marches off the stage Euripides!

'No such thin fare feeds flesh and blood like mine  
 No such faint fume of fancy sates my soul,  
 No such seclusion, closet, cave or court,  
 Suits either: give me Iostephanos



Worth making happy what coarse way she will—  
 O happy-maker, when her cries increase  
 About the favourite! "Aristophanes!  
 More grist to mill, here 's Kleophon to grind!  
 He 's for refusing peace, though Sparté cede  
 Even Dekeleia! Here 's Kleonumos  
 Declaring—though he threw away his shield,  
 He 'll thrash you till you lay your lyre aside!  
 Orestes bids mind where you walk of nights—  
 He wants your cloak as you his cudgelling:  
 Here 's, finally, Melanthios fat with fish,  
 The gormandizer-spendthrift-dramatist!  
 So, bustle! Pounce on opportunity!  
 Let fun a-screaming in Parabasis,  
 Find food for folk agape at either end,  
 Mad for amusement! Times grow better too,  
 And should they worsen, why, who laughs, forgets.  
 In no case, venture boy-experiments!  
 Old wine 's the wine: new poetry drinks raw:  
 Two plays a season is your pledge, beside;  
 So, give us "Wasps" again, grown hornets now!"

Then he changed.

'Do you so detect in me—

Brow-bald, chin-bearded, me, curved cheek, carved lip,  
 Or where soul sits and reigns in either eye—  
 What suits the—stigma, I say,—style say you,  
 Of "Wine-lees-poet"? Bravest of buffoons,  
 Less blunt than Telekleides, less obscene  
 Than Murtilos, Hermippos: quite a match  
 In elegance for Eupolis himself,  
 Yet pungent as Kratinos at his best?  
 Graced with traditional immunity  
 Ever since, much about my grandsire's time,  
 Some funny village-man in Megara,  
 Lout-lord and clown-king, used a privilege,  
 As due religious drinking-bouts came round,  
 To daub his phyz,—no, that was afterwards,—  
 He merely mounted cart with mates of choice  
 And traversed country, taking house by house,  
 At night,—because of danger in the freak,—  
 Then hollaed "Skin-flint starves his labourers!  
 Clench-fist stows figs away, cheats government!

Such an one likes to kiss his neighbour's wife,  
 And beat his own; while such another . . . Boh!"  
 Soon came the broad day, circumstantial tale,  
 Dancing and verse, and there 's our Comedy,  
 There 's Mullos, there 's Euetes, there 's the stock  
 I shall be proud to graft my powers upon!  
 Protected? Punished quite as certainly  
 When Archons pleased to lay down each his law,—  
 Your Morucheides-Surakosios sort,—  
 Each season, "No more naming citizens,  
 Only abuse the vice, the vicious spare!  
 Observe, henceforth no Areopagite  
 Demean his rank by writing Comedy!"  
 (They one and all could write the "Clouds" of course.)  
 "Needs must we nick expenditure, allow  
 Comedy half a choros, supper—none,  
 Times being hard, while applicants increase  
 For, what costs cash, the Tragic Trilogy."  
 Lofty Tragedians! How they lounge aloof  
 Each with his Triad, three plays to my one,  
 Not counting the contemptuous fourth, the frank  
 Concession to mere mortal levity,  
 Satyric pittance tossed our beggar-world!  
 Your proud Euripides from first to last  
 Doled out some five such, never deigned us more!  
 And these—what curds and whey for marrowy wine!  
 That same Alkestis you so rave about  
 Passed muster with him for a Satyr-play,  
 The prig!—why trifle time with toys and skits  
 When he could stuff four ragbags sausage-wise  
 With sophistry, with bookish odds and ends,  
 Sokrates, meteors, moonshine, "Life 's not Life,"  
 "The tongue swore, but unsworn the mind remains,"  
 And fifty such concoctions, crab-tree fruit  
 Digested while, head low and heels in heaven,  
 He lay, let Comics laugh—for privilege!  
 Looked puzzled on, or pityingly off,  
 But never dreamed of paying gibe by jeer,  
 Buffet by blow: plenty of proverb-pokes  
 At vice and folly, wicked kings, mad mobs!  
 No sign of wincing at my Comic lash,  
 No protest against infamous abuse,  
 Malignant censure,—nought to prove I scourged

With tougher thong than leek-and-onion-plait!  
 If ever he glanced gloom, aggrieved at all,  
 The aggriever must be—Aischulos perhaps:  
 Or Sophokles he 'd take exception to.  
 —Do you detect in me—in me, I ask,  
 The man like to accept this measurement  
 Of faculty, contentedly sit classed  
 Mere Comic Poet—since I wrote “The Birds”?’

I thought there might lurk truth in jest's disguise.

‘Thanks!’ he resumed, so quick to construe smile!  
 ‘I answered—in my mind—these gapers thus:  
 Since old wine 's ripe and new verse raw, you judge—  
 What if I vary vintage-mode and mix  
 Blossom with must, give nosegay to the brew,  
 Fining, refining, gently, surely, till  
 The educated taste turns unawares  
 From customary dregs to draught divine?  
 Then answered—with my lips: More “Wasps” you  
 want?

Come next year and I give you “Grasshoppers”!  
 And “Grasshoppers” I gave them,—last month's play.  
 They formed the Choros. Alkibiades,  
 No longer Triphales but Trilophos,  
 (Whom I called Darling-of-the-Summertime,  
 Born to be nothing else but beautiful  
 And brave, to eat, drink, love his life away)  
 Persuades the Tettix (our Autochthon-brood,  
 That sip the dew and sing on olive-branch  
 Above the ant-and-emmet populace)  
 To summon all who meadow, hill and dale  
 Inhabit—bee, wasp, woodlouse, dragonfly—  
 To band themselves against red nipper-nose  
 Stagbeetle, huge Taügetan (you guess—  
 Sparté) Athenai needs must battle with,  
 Because her sons are grown effeminate  
 To that degree—so morbifies their flesh  
 The poison-drama of Euripides,  
 Morals and music—there 's no antidote  
 Occurs save warfare which inspirits blood,  
 And brings us back perchance the blessed time  
 When (Choros takes up tale) our commonalty

Firm in primeval virtue, antique faith,  
 Ere earwig-sophist plagued or pismire-sage,  
 Cockered no noddle up with A, b, g,  
 Book-learning, logic-chopping, and the moon,  
 But just employed their brains on "*Ruppapai*,  
 Row, boys, much barley-bread, and take your ease—  
 Mindful, however, of the tier beneath!"  
 Ah, golden epoch! while the nobler sort  
 (Such needs must study, no contesting that!)  
 Wore no long curls but used to crop their hair,  
 Gathered the tunic well about the ham,  
 Remembering 't was soft sand they used for seat  
 At school-time, while—mark this—the lesson long,  
 No learner ever dared to cross his legs!  
 Then, if you bade him take the myrtle-bough  
 And sing for supper—'t was some grave romaunt  
*How man of Mitulené, wondrous wise,*  
*Jumped into hedge, by mortals quickset called,*  
*And there, anticipating Oidipous,*  
*Scratched out his eyes and scratched them in again.*  
 None of your Phaidras, Augés, Kanakés,  
 To mincing music, turn, trill, tweedle trash,  
 Whence comes that Marathon is obsolete!  
 Next, my Antistrophé was—praise of Peace:  
 Ah, could our people know what Peace implies!  
 Home to the farm and furrow! Grub one's vine,  
 Romp with one's Thratta, pretty serving-girl,  
 When wife's busy bathing! Eat and drink,  
 And drink and eat, what else is good in life?  
 Slice hare, toss pancake, gaily gurgles down  
 The Thasian grape in celebration due  
 Of Bacchos! Welcome, dear domestic rite,  
 When wife and sons and daughters, Thratta too,  
 Pour peasoup as we chant delectably  
*In Bacchos reels, his tunic at his heels!*  
 Enough, you comprehend,—I do at least!  
 Then,—be but patient,—the Parabasis!  
 Pray! For in that I also pushed reform  
 None of the self-laudation, vulgar brag,  
 Vainglorious rivals cultivate so much!  
 No! If some merest word in Art's defence  
 Justice demanded of me,—never fear!  
 Claim was preferred, but dignifiedly.

A cricket asked a locust (winged, you know)  
What he had seen most rare in foreign parts?  
"I have flown far," chirped he, "North, East, South,  
West,  
And nowhere heard of poet worth a fig  
If matched with Bald-head here, Algina's boast,  
Who in this play bids rivalry despair  
Past, present, and to come, so marvellous  
His Tragic, Comic, Lyric excellence!  
Whereof the fit reward were (not to speak  
Of dinner every day at public cost  
I' the Prutaneion) supper with yourselves,  
My Public, best dish offered bravest bard!"  
No more! no sort of sin against good taste!  
Then, satire,—Oh, a plain necessity!  
But I won't tell you: for—could I dispense  
With one more gird at old Ariphrades?  
How scorpion-like he feeds on human flesh—  
Ever finds out some novel infamy  
Unutterable, inconceivable,  
Which all the greater need was to describe  
Minutely, each tail-twist at ink-shed time . . .  
Now, what's your gesture caused by? What you  
loathe,  
Don't I loathe doubly, else why take such pains  
To tell it you? But keep your prejudice!  
My audience justified you! Housebreakers!  
This pattern-purity was played and failed  
Last Rural Dionusia—failed! for why?  
Ameipsias followed with the genuine stuff.  
He had been mindful to engage the Four—  
Karkinos and his dwarf-crab-family—  
Father and sons, they whirled like spinning-tops,  
Choros gigantically poked his fun,  
The boys' frank laugh relaxed the seniors' brow,  
The skies re-echoed victory's acclaim,  
Ameipsias gained his due, I got my dose  
Of wisdom for the future. Purity?  
No more of that next month, Athenai mine;  
Contrive new cut of robe who will,—I patch  
The old exomis, add no purple sleeve!  
The Thesmophoriazousai, smartened up  
With certain plaits, shall please, I promise you



'Yes, I took up the play that failed last year,  
 And re-arranged things; threw adroitly in,—  
 No Parachoregema,—men to match  
 My women there already; and when these  
 (I had a hit at Aristullos here,  
 His plan how womankind should rule the roast)  
 Drove men to plough—"A-field, ye cribbed of cape!"  
 Men showed themselves exempt from service straight  
 Stupendously, till all the boys cried "Brave!"  
 Then for the elders, I bethought me too,  
 Improved upon Mnesilochos' release  
 From the old bowman, board and binding-strap:  
 I made his son-in-law Euripides  
 Engage to put both shrewish wives away—  
 "Gravity" one, the other "Sophist-lore"—  
 And mate with the Bald Bard's hetairai twain—  
 "Goodhumour" and "Indulgence": on they tripped.  
 Murrhiné, Akalanthis,—"beautiful  
 Their whole belongings"—crowd joined choros there!  
 And while the Toxotes wound up his part  
 By shower of nuts and sweetmeats on the mob,  
 The woman-choros celebrated New  
 Kalligeneia, the frank last-day rite,  
 Brief, I was chaired and caressed and crowned  
 And the whole theatre broke out a-roar,  
 Echoed my admonition—choros-cap—  
*Rivals of mine, your hands to your faces !*  
*Summon no more the Muses, the Graces,*  
*Since here by my side they have chosen their places !*  
 And so we all flocked merrily to feast,  
 I, my choragos, choros, actors, mutes  
 And flutes aforesaid, friends in crowd, no fear,  
 At the Priest's supper; and hilarity  
 Grew none the less that, early in the piece,  
 Ran a report, from row to row close-packed,  
 Of messengers' arrival at the Port  
 With weighty tidings, "Of Lusandros' flight,"  
 Opined one; "That Euboia penitent  
 Sends the Confederation fifty ships,"  
 Preferred another; while "The Great King's Eye  
 Has brought a present for Elaphion here,  
 That rarest peacock Kompolakuthes!"  
 Such was the supposition of a third.



"No matter what the news," friend Strattis laughed,  
 "It won't be worse for waiting: while each click  
 Of the klepsudra set a-shaking grave  
 Resentment in our shark's-head, boiled and spoiled  
 By this time: dished in Sphettian vinegar,  
 Silphion and honey, served with cocks'-brain-sauce!  
 So, swift to supper, Poet! No mistake,  
 This play; nor, like the unflavoured 'Grasshoppers,'  
 Salt without thyme! Right merrily we supped,  
 Till—something happened.

'Out it shall, at last!

'Mirth drew to ending, for the cup was crowned  
 To the Triumphant! "Kleonclapper erst,  
 Now, Plier of a scourge Euripides  
 Fairly turns tail from, flying Attiké  
 For Makedonia's rocks and frosts and bears,  
 Where, furry grown, he growls to match the squeak  
 Of girl-voiced, crocus-vested Agathon!  
 Ha ha, he he!" When suddenly a knock—  
 Sharp, solitary, cold, authoritative.

"*Babaiax!* Sokrates a-passing by,  
 A-peering in for Aristullos' sake,  
 To put a question touching Comic Law?"  
 'No! Enters an old pale-swathed majesty,  
 Makes slow mute passage through two ranks as mute,  
 (Strattis stood up with all the rest, the sneak!)  
 Grey brow still bent on ground, upraised at length  
 When, our Priest reached, full-front the vision paused

"'Priest!"—the deep tone succeeded the fixed gaze—  
 Thou carest that thy god have spectacle  
 Decent and seemly; wherefore I announce  
 That, since Euripides is dead to-day,  
 My Choros, at the Greater Feast, next month,  
 Shall, clothed in black, appear ungarlanded!"

'Then the grey brow sank low, and Sophokles  
 Re-swathed him, sweeping doorward: mutely passed  
 'Twixt rows as mute, to mingle possibly

With certain gods who convoy age to port;  
And night resumed him.

‘When our stupor broke,  
Chirpings took courage, and grew audible.

“Dead—so one speaks now of Euripides!  
Ungarlanded dance Choros, did he say?  
I guess the reason: in extreme old age  
No doubt such have the gods for visitants.  
Why did he dedicate to Herakles  
An altar else, but that the god, turned Judge,  
Told him in dream who took the crown of gold?  
He who restored Akropolis the theft,  
Himself may feel perhaps a timely twinge  
At thought of certain other crowns he filched  
From—who now visits Herakles the Judge.  
Instance ‘Medeia!’ that play yielded palm  
To Sophokles; and he again—to whom?  
Euphorion! Why? Ask Herakles the Judge!”

“Ungarlanded, just means—economy!  
Suppress robes, chaplets, everything suppress  
Except the poet’s present! An old tale  
Put capitally by Trugaios—eh?  
—News from the world of transformation strange!  
How Sophokles is grown Simonides,  
And,—aged, rotten,—all the same, for greed  
Would venture on a hurdle out to sea!—  
So jokes Philonides. Kallistratos  
Retorts—Mistake! Instead of stinginess,  
The fact is, in extreme decrepitude  
He has discarded poet and turned priest,  
Priest of Half-Hero Alkon: visited  
In his own house too by Asklepios’ self,  
So he avers. Meanwhile, his own estate  
Lies fallow; Iophon’s the manager,—  
Nay, touches up a play, brings out the same,  
Asserts true sonship. See to what you sink  
After your dozen-dozen prodigies!  
Looking so old—Euripides seems young,  
Born ten years later.”

“Just his tricky style!  
Since, stealing first away, he wins first word  
Out of good-natured rival Sophokles,  
Procures himself no bad panegyric.  
Had fate willed otherwise, himself were taxed  
To pay survivor's-tribute,—harder squeezed  
From anybody beaten first to last,  
Than one who, steadily a conqueror,  
Finds that his magnanimity is tasked  
To merely make pretence and—beat itself!”

‘So chirped the feasters though suppressedly.

‘But I—what else do you suppose?—had pierced  
Quite through friends' outside-straining, foes' mock-  
praise,  
And reached conviction hearted under all.  
Death's rapid line had closed a life's account,  
And cut off, left unalterably clear  
The summed-up value of Euripides.  
Well, it might be the Thasian! Certainly  
There sang suggestive music in my ears;  
And, through—what sophists style—the wall of sense  
My eyes pierced: death seemed life and life seemed death,  
Envisaged that way, now, which I, before,  
Conceived was just a moonstruck mood. Quite plain  
There re-insisted,—ay, each prim stiff phrase  
Of each old play, my still-new laughing-stock,  
Had meaning, well worth poet's pains to state,  
Should life prove half true life's term,—death, the rest.  
As for the other question, late so large  
Now all at once so little,—he or I,  
Which better comprehended playwright craft,—  
There, too, old admonition took fresh point.  
As clear recurred our last word-interchange  
Two years since, when I tried with “Ploutos.” “Vain!”  
Saluted me the cold grave-bearded bard—  
“Vain, this late trial, Aristophanes!  
None baulks the genius with impunity!  
You know what kind 's the nobler, what makes grave  
Or what makes grin; there 's yet a nobler still,  
Possibly,—what makes wise, not grave,—and glad,  
Not grinning: whereby laughter joins with tears,

Tragic and Comic Poet prove one power,  
And Aristophanes becomes our Fourth—  
Nay, greatest! Never needs the Art stand still,  
But those Art leans on lag, and none like you,  
Her strongest of supports, whose step aside  
Undoes the march: defection checks advance  
Too late adventured! See the 'Ploutos' here!  
This step decides your foot from old to new—  
Proves you relinquish song and dance and jest,  
Discard the beast, and, rising from all-fours,  
Fain would paint, manlike, actual human life,  
Make veritable men think, say and do.  
Here 's the conception: which to execute,  
Where 's force? Spent! Ere the race began, was breath  
O' the runner squandered on each friendly fool—  
Wit-fireworks fizzed off while day craved no flame:  
How should the night receive her due of fire  
Flared out in Wasps and Horses, Clouds and Birds,  
Prodigiously a-crackle? Rest content!  
The new adventure for the novel man  
Born to that next success myself foresee  
In right of where I reach before I rest.  
At end of a long course, straight all the way,  
Well may there tremble somewhat into ken  
The untrod path, clouds veiled from earlier gaze!  
None may live two lives: I have lived mine through,  
Die where I first stand still. You retrograde.  
I leave my life's work. I compete with you,  
My last with your last, my Antiope—  
Phoinissai—with this Ploutos? No, I think!  
Ever shall great and awful Victory  
Accompany my life—in Maketis  
If not Athenai. Take my farewell, friend!  
Friend,—for from no consummate excellence  
Like yours, whatever fault may countervail,  
Do I profess estrangement: murk the marsh,  
Yet where a solitary marble block  
Blanches the gloom, there let the eagle perch!  
You show—what splinters of Pentelikos,  
Islanded by what ordure! Eagles fly,  
Rest on the right place, thence depart as free;  
But 'ware man's footstep, would it traverse mire  
Untainted! Mire is safe for worms that crawl.

'Balaustion! Here are very many words,  
All to portray one moment's rush of thought,—  
And much they do it! Still, you understand.  
The Archon, the Feast-master, read their sum  
And substance, judged the banquet-glow extinct,  
So rose, discreetly if abruptly, crowned  
The parting cup,—"To the Good Genius, then!"

'Up starts young Strattis for a final flash:  
"Ay the Good Genius! To the Comic Muse,  
She who evolves superiority,  
Triumph and joy from sorrow, **unsuccess**  
And all that's incomplete in human life;  
Who proves such actual failure transient wrong,  
Since out of body uncouth, halt and maimed—  
Since out of soul grotesque, corrupt or blank—  
Fancy, uplifted by the Muse, can flit  
To soul and body, re-instate them Man:  
Beside which perfect man, how clear we see  
Divergency from type was earth's effect!  
Escaping whence by laughter,—Fancy's feat,—  
We right man's wrong, establish true for false,—  
Above misshapen body, uncouth soul,  
Reach the fine form, the clear intelligence—  
Above unseemliness, reach decent law,—  
By laughter: attestation of the Muse  
That low-and-ugsome is not signed and sealed  
Incontrovertibly man's portion here,  
Or, if here,—why, still high-and-fair exists  
In that ethereal realm where laughs our soul  
Lift by the Muse. Hail thou her ministrant!  
Hail who accepted no deformity  
In man as normal and remediless,  
But rather pushed it to such gross extreme  
That, outraged, we protest by eye's recoil  
The opposite proves somewhere rule and law!  
Hail who implied, by limning Lamachos,  
Plenty and pastime wait on peace, not war!  
Philokleon—better bear a wrong than plead,  
Play the litigious fool to stuff the mouth  
Of dikast with the due three-obol fee!  
The Paphlagonian—stick to the old sway  
Of few and wise, not rabble-government!

Trugaios, Pisthetairos, Strepsiades,—  
 Why multiply examples? Hail, in fine,  
 The hero of each painted monster—so  
 Suggesting the unpictured perfect shape!  
 Pour out! A laugh to Aristophanes!”

‘Stay, my fine Strattis’—and I stopped applause  
 ‘To the Good Genuis—but the Tragic Muse!  
 She who instructs her poet, bids man’s soul  
 Play man’s part merely nor attempt the gods’  
 Ill-guessed of! Task humanity to height,  
 Put passion to prime use, urge will, unshamed  
 When will’s last effort breaks in impotence!  
 No power forgo, elude: no weakness,—plied  
 Fairly by power and will,—renounce, deny!  
 Acknowledge, in such mis-called weakness strength  
 Latent: and substitute thus things for words!  
 Make man run life’s race fairly,—legs and feet,  
 Craving no false wings to o’erfly its length!  
 Trust on, trust ever, trust to end—in truth!  
 By truth of extreme passion, utmost will,  
 Shame back all false display of either force—  
 Barrier about such strenuous heat and glow.  
 That cowardice shall shirk contending,—cant,  
 Pretension, shrivel at truth’s first approach!  
 Pour to the Tragic Muse’s ministrant  
 Who, as he pictured pure Hippolotos,  
 Abolished our earth’s blot Aiphrades;  
 Who, as he drew Bellerophon the bold,  
 Proclaimed Kleonumos incredible;  
 Who, as his Theseus towered up man once more.  
 Made Alkibiades shrink boy again!  
 A tear—no woman’s tribute, weak exchange  
 For action, water spent and heart’s-blood saved—  
 No man’s regret for greatness gone, ungraced  
 Perchance by even that poor meed, man’s praise—  
 But some god’s superabundance of desire,  
 Yearning of will to ’scape necessity,—  
 Love’s overbrimming for self-sacrifice,  
 Whence good might be, which never else may be,  
 By power displayed, forbidden this strait sphere,—  
 Effort expressible one only way—  
 Such tear from me fall to Euripides!’



The Thasian!—All, the Thasian, I account!  
Whereupon outburst the whole company  
Into applause and—laughter, would you think?

'The unrivalled one! How, never at a loss,  
He turns the Tragic on its Comic side  
Else imperceptible! Here's death itself—  
Death of a rival, of an enemy,—  
Scarce seen as Comic till the master-touch  
Made it acknowledge Aristophanes!  
Lo, that Euripidean laurel tree  
Struck to the heart by lightning! Sokrates  
Would question us, with buzz of how and why,  
Wherefore the berry's virtue, the bloom's vice,  
Till we all wished him quiet with his friend;  
Agathon would compose an elegy,  
Lyric bewailment fit to move a stone,  
And, stones responsive, we might wince, 't is like:  
Nay, with most cause of all to weep the least,  
Sophokles ordains mourning for his sake  
While we confess to a remorseful twinge:—  
Suddenly, who but Aristophanes,  
Prompt to the rescue, puts forth solemn hand,  
Singles us out the tragic tree's best branch,  
Persuades it groundward and, at tip, appends,  
For votive-visor, Faun's goat-grinning face!  
Back it flies, evermore with jest a-top.  
And we recover the true mood, and laugh!'

'I felt as when some Nikias,—ninny-like  
Troubled by sunspot-portent, moon-eclipse,—  
At fault a little, sees no choice but sound  
Retreat from foeman; and his troops mistake  
The signal, and hail onset in the blast,  
And at their joyous answer, *alalé*,  
Back the old courage brings the scattered wits;  
He wonders what his doubt meant, quick confirms  
The happy error, blows the charge amain.  
So I repaired things.

'Both be praised' thanked I.

'You who have laughed with Aristophanes,  
You who wept rather with the Lord of Tears!

Priest, do thou, president alike o'er each,  
Tragic and Comic function of the god,  
Help with libation to the blended twain!  
Either of which who serving, only serves—  
Proclaims himself disqualified to pour  
To that Good Genius—complex Poetry,  
Uniting each god-grace, including both:  
Which, operant for body as for soul,  
Masters alike the laughter and the tears,  
Supreme in lowliest earth, sublimest sky.  
Who dares disjoin these,—whether he ignores  
Body or soul, whichever half destroys,—  
Maims the else perfect manhood, perpetrates  
Again the inextinguishable crime we curse—  
Hacks at the Hermai, halves each guardian shape  
Combining, nowise vainly, prominence  
Of august head and enthroned intellect,  
With homelier symbol of asserted sense,—  
Nature's prime impulse, earthly appetite.  
For, when our folly ventures on the freak,  
Would fain abolish joy and fruitfulness,  
Mutilate nature—what avails the Head  
Left solitarily predominant,—  
Unbodied soul,—not Hermes, both in one?  
I, no more than our City, acquiesce  
In such a desecration, but defend  
Man's double nature—ay, wert thou its foe!  
Could I once more, thou cold Euripides,  
Encounter thee, in nought would I abate  
My warfare, nor subdue my worst attack  
On thee whose life-work preached "Raise soul, sink  
sense!  
Evirate Hermes!"—would avenge the god,  
And justify myself. Once face to face,  
Thou, the argute and tricky, shouldst not wrap,  
As thine old fashion was, in silent scorn  
The breast that quickened at the sting of truth,  
Nor turn from me, as, if the tale be true,  
From Lais when she met thee in thy walks,  
And questioned why she had no rights as thou:  
Not so shouldst thou betake thee, be assured,  
To book and pencil, deign me no reply!  
I would extract an answer from those lips

So closed and cold, were mine the garden-chance!  
Gone from the world! Does none remain to take  
Thy part and ply me with thy sophist-skill?  
No sun makes proof of his whole potency  
For gold and purple in that orb we view:  
The apparent orb does little but leave blind  
The audacious, and confused the worshipping;  
But, close on orb's departure, must succeed  
The serviceable cloud,—must intervene,  
Induce expenditure of rose and blue,  
Reveal what lay in him was lost to us.  
So, friends, what hinders, as we homeward go,  
If, privileged by triumph gained to-day,  
We clasp that cloud our sun left saturate,  
The Rhodian rosy with Euripides?  
Not of my audience on my triumph-day,  
She nor her husband! After the night's news  
Neither will sleep but watch; I know the mood.  
Accompany! my crown declares my right!  
And here you stand with those warm golden eyes!

'In honest language, I am scarce too sure  
Whether I really felt, indeed expressed  
Then, in that presence, things I now repeat:  
Nor half, nor any one word,—will that do?  
May be, such eyes must strike conviction, turn  
One's nature bottom upwards, show the base—  
The live rock latent under wave and foam:  
Superimposure these! Yet solid stuff  
Will ever and anon, obeying star,  
(And what star reaches rock-nerve like an eye?)  
Swim up to surface, spout or mud or flame,  
And find no more to do than sink as fast.

'Anyhow, I have followed happily  
The impulse, pledged my Genius with effect,  
Since come to see you, I am shown—myself!'

I answered:

'One of us declared for both  
'Welcome the glory of Aristophanes.'  
The other adds: and,—if that glory last,

Nor marsh-born vapour creep to veil the same,—  
Once entered, share in our solemnity!  
Commemorate, as we, Euripides!'

'What?' he looked round, 'I darken the bright house?  
Profane the temple of your deity?  
That's true! Else wherefore does he stand portrayed?  
What Rhodian paint and pencil saved so much,  
Beard, freckled face, brow—all but breath, I hope!  
Come, that's unfair: myself am somebody,  
Yet my pictorial fame's just potter's-work,—  
I merely figure on men's drinking-mugs!  
I and the Flat-nose, Sophroniskos' son,  
Oft make a pair. But what's this lies below?  
His table-book and graver, playwright's tool!  
And lo, the sweet psalterion, strung and screwed,  
Whereon he tried those *le-é-é-és*  
And *ke-é-é-és* and turns and trills,  
Lovely lark's *tirra-lirra*, lad's delight!  
Aischulos' bronze-throat eagle-bark at blood  
Has somehow spoiled my taste for twitterings!  
With . . . what, and did he leave you "Herakles"?  
The "Frenzied Hero," one unfractured sheet,  
No pine-wood tablets smeared with treacherous wax—  
Papuros perfect as e'er tempted pen!  
This sacred twist of bay-leaves dead and sere  
Must be that crown the fine work failed to catch,—  
No wonder! This might crown "Antiope."  
"Herakles" triumph? In your heart perhaps!  
But elsewhere? Come now, I'll explain the case,  
Show you the main mistake. Give me the sheet!'

I interrupted:

'Aristophanes!

The stranger-woman sues in her abode—  
"Be honoured as our guest!" But, call it—shrine,  
Then "No dishonour to the Daimon!" bids  
The priestess "or expect dishonour's due!"  
You enter fresh from your worst infamy,  
Last instance of long outrage; yet I pause,  
Withhold the word a-tremble on my lip,  
Incline me, rather, yearn to reverence,—

So you but suffer that I see the blaze  
And not the bolt,—the splendid fancy-fling,  
Not the cold iron malice, the launched lie  
Whence heavenly fire has withered; impotent,  
Yet execrable, leave it 'neath the look  
Of yon impassive presence! What he scorned.  
His life long, need I touch, offend my foot,  
To prove that malice missed its mark, that lie  
Cumbers the ground, returns to whence it came?  
I marvel, I deplore,—the rest be mute!  
But, throw off hate's celestialty,—  
Show me, apart from song-flash and wit-flame,  
A mere man's hand ignobly clenched against  
Yon supreme calmness,—and I interpose,  
Such as you see me! Silk breaks lightning's blow!'

He seemed to scarce so much as notice me,  
Aught had I spoken, save the final phrase:  
Arrested there.

'Euripides grown calm!  
Calmness supreme means dead and therefore safe,'  
He muttered; then more audibly began—

'Dead! Such must die! Could people comprehend!  
There's the unfairness of it! So obtuse  
Are all: from Solon downward with his saw  
"Let none revile the dead,—no, though the son,  
Nay, far descendant, should revile thyself!"—  
To him who made Elektra, in the act  
Of wreaking vengeance on her worst of foes,  
Scruple to blame, since speech that blames insults  
Too much the very villain life-released.  
Now, *I* say, only after death, begins  
That formidable claim,—immunity  
Of faultiness from fault's due punishment!  
The living, who defame me,—why, they live:  
Fools,—I best prove them foolish by their life,  
Will they but work on, lay their work by mine,  
And wait a little, one Olympiad, say!  
Then—where's the vital force, mine froze beside?  
The sturdy fibre, shamed my brittle stuff?  
The school-correctness, sure of wise award

When my vagaries cease to tickle taste?  
 Where 's censure that must sink me, judgment big  
 Awaiting just the word posterity  
 Pants to pronounce? Time's wave breaks, buries  
*whom,*

Fools, when myself confronts you four years hence?  
 But die, ere next Lenaia,—safely so  
 You 'scape me, slink with all your ignorance,  
 Stupidity and malice, to that hole  
 O'er which survivors croak "Respect the dead!"  
 Ay, for I needs must! But allow me clutch  
 Only a carrion-handful, lend it sense,  
 (Mine, not its own, or could it answer me?)  
 And question 'You, I pluck from hiding-place,  
 Whose cant was, certain years ago, my "Clouds"  
 Might last until the swallows came with Spring—  
 Whose chatter, "Birds" are unintelligible,  
 Mere psychologic puzzling: poetry?  
 List, the true lay to rock a cradle with!  
*O man of Mitulené, wondrous wise !'*

—Would not I rub each face in its own filth  
 To tune of "Now that years have come and gone,  
 How does the fact stand? What's demonstrable  
 By time, that tries things?—your own test, not mine  
 Who think men are, were, ever will be fools,  
 Though somehow fools confute fools,—as these, you!  
 Don't mumble to the sheepish twos and threes  
 You cornered and called 'audience'! Face this *me*  
 Who know, and can, and—helped by fifty years—  
 Do pulverize you pygmies, then as now!"

'Ay, now as then, I pulverize the brood,  
 Balaustion! Mindful, from the first, where foe  
 Would hide head safe when hand had flung its stone,  
 I did not turn cheek and take pleasantry,  
 But flogged while skin could purple and flesh start,  
 To teach fools whom they tried conclusions with.  
 First face a-splutter at me got such splotch  
 Of prompt slab mud as, filling mouth to maw,  
 Made its concern thenceforward not so much  
 To criticize me as go cleanse itself.  
 The only drawback to which huge delight,—  
 (He saw it, how he saw it, that calm cold



Sagacity you call Euripides!)

—Why, 't is that, make a muckheap of a man,  
There, pillared by your prowess, he remains,  
Immortally immerded. Not so he!

Men pelted him but got no pellet back.

He reasoned, I 'll engage,—“Acquaint the world  
Certain minuteness butted at my knee?

Dogface Eruxis, the small satirist,—

What better would the manikin desire

Than to strut forth on tiptoe, notable

As who, so far up, fouled me in the flank?”

So dealt he with the dwarfs: we giants, too,

Why must we emulate their pin-point play?

Render imperishable—impotence,

For mud throw mountains? Zeus, by mud unreachd,—

Well, 't was no dwarf he heaved Olumpus at!’

My heart burned up within me to my tongue.

‘And why must men remember, ages hence,

Who it was rolled down rocks, but refuse too—

Strattis might steal from! mixture-monument,

Recording what? “I, Aristophanes,

Who boast me much inventive in my art,

Against Euripides thus volleyed muck

Because, in art, he too extended bounds.

I—patriot, loving peace and hating war,—

Choosing the rule of few, but wise and good,

Rather than mob-dictature, fools and knaves

However multiplied their mastery,—

Despising most of all the demagogue,

(Noisome air-bubble, buoyed up, borne along

By kindred breath of knave and fool below,

Whose hearts swell proudly as each puffing face

Grows big, reflected in that glassy ball,

Vacuity, just bellied out to break

And righteously bespatter friends the first)—

I loathing,—beyond less puissant speech

Than my own god-grand language to declare,—

The fawning, cozenage and calumny

Wherewith such favourite feeds the populace

That fan and set him flying for reward:—

I who, detecting what vice underlies

Thought's superstructure,—fancy's sludge and slime  
 'Twixt fact's sound floor and thought's mere surface-  
 growth

Of hopes and fears which root no deeper down  
 Than where all such mere fungi breed and bloat—  
 Namely, man's misconception of the God:—  
 I, loving, hating, wishful, from my soul  
 That truth should triumph, falsehood have defeat,  
 —Why, all my soul's supremacy of power  
 Did I pour out in volley just on him  
 Who, his whole life long, championed every cause  
 I called my heart's cause, loving as I loved,  
 Hating my hates, spurned falsehood, championed  
 truth,—

Championed truth not by flagellating foe  
 With simple rose and lily, gibe and jeer,  
 Sly wink of boon-companion o'er his bowze  
 Who, while he blames the liquor, smacks the lip,  
 Blames, doubtless, but leers condonation too,—  
 No, the ballad fist broke brow like thunderbolt,  
 Battered till brain flew! Seeing which descent,  
 None questioned that was first acquaintanceship,  
 The avenger's with the vice he crashed through bone.  
 Still, he displeased me; and I turned from foe  
 To fellow-fighter, flung much stone, more mud,—  
 But missed him, since he lives aloof, I see,"  
 Pah! stop more shame, deep-cutting glory through,  
 Nor add, this poet, learned,—found no taunt  
 Tell like "That other poet studies books!"  
 Wise,—cried "At each attempt to move our hearts,  
 He uses the mere phrase of daily life!"  
 Witty,—“His mother was a herb-woman!”  
 Veracious, honest, loyal, fair and good,—  
 “It was Kephisophon who helped him write!”

‘Whence,—O the tragic end of comedy!—

Balaustion pities Aristophanes.

For, who believed him? Those who laughed so loud?

They heard him call the sun Sicilian cheese!

Had he called true cheese—curd, would muscle move?

What made them laugh but the enormous lie?

“Kephisophon wrote Herakles? ha, ha,

What can have stirred the wine-dregs, soured the soul

And set a-lying Aristophanes?  
 Some accident at which he took offence!  
 The Tragic Master in a moody muse  
 Passed him unhailing, and it hurts—it hurts!  
 Beside, there 's licence for the Wine-lees-song!'''

Blood burnt the cheek-bone, each black eye flashed  
 fierce.

'But this exceeds our licence! Stay awhile—  
 That 's the solution! both are foreigners,  
 The fresh-come Rhodian lady and her spouse  
 The man of Phokis: newly resident,  
 Nowise instructed—that explains it all!  
 No born and bred Athenian but would smile,  
 Unless frown seemed more fit for ignorance.  
 These strangers have a privilege!

'You blame'

(Presently he resumed with milder mien)  
 'Both theory and practice—Comedy:  
 Blame her from altitudes the Tragic friend  
 Rose to, and upraised friends along with him,  
 No matter how. Once there, all 's cold and fine,  
 Passionless, rational; our world beneath  
 Shows (should you condescend to grace so much  
 As glance at poor Athenai) grimly gross—  
 A population which, mere flesh and blood,  
 Eats, drinks and kisses, falls to fisticuffs,  
 Then hugs as hugely: speaks too as it acts,  
 Prodigiously talks nonsense,—townsman needs  
 Must parley in their town's vernacular.  
 Such world has, of two courses, one to choose:  
 Unworld itself,—or else go blackening off  
 To its crow-kindred, leave philosophy  
 Her heights serene, fit perch for owls like you.  
 Now, since the world demurs to either course,  
 Permit me,—in default of boy or girl,  
 So they be reared Athenian, good and true,—  
 To praise what you most blame! Hear Art's defence!  
 I'll prove our institution, Comedy,  
 Coëval with the birth of freedom, matched  
 So nice with our Republic, that its growth

Measures each greatness, just as its decline  
 Would signalize the downfall of the pair.  
 Our Art began when Bacchos . . . never mind!  
 You and your master don't acknowledge gods:  
 "They are not, no, they are not!" well,—began  
 When the rude instinct of our race outspoke,  
 Found,—on recurrence of festivity  
 Occasioned by black mother-earth's good will  
 To children, as they took her vintage-gifts,—  
 Found—not the least of many benefits—  
 That wine unlocked the stiffest lip, and loosed  
 The tongue late dry and reticent of joke,  
 Through custom's gripe which gladness thrusts aside.  
 So, emulating liberalities,  
 Heaven joined with earth for that god's day at least,  
 Renewed man's privilege, grown obsolete,  
 Of telling truth nor dreading punishment.  
 Whereon the joyous band disguised their forms  
 With skins, beast-fashion, daubed each phyz with dregs,  
 Then hollaed "Neighbour, you are fool, you—knave,  
 You—hard to serve, you—stingy to reward!"  
 The guiltless crowed, the guilty sunk their crest,  
 And good folk gained thereby, 't was evident.  
 Whence, by degrees, a birth of happier thought,  
 The notion came—not simply this to say,  
 But this to do—prove, put in evidence,  
 And act the fool, the knave, the harsh, the hunks,  
 Who *did* prate, cheat, shake fist, draw pursestring tight,  
 As crowd might see, which only heard before.

'So played the Poet, with his man of parts;  
 And all the others, found unqualified  
 To mount cart and be persons, made the mob,  
 Joined choros, fortified their fellows' fun,  
 Anticipated the community,  
 Gave judgment which the public ratified.  
 Suiting rough weapon doubtless to plain truth,  
 They flung, for word-artillery, why—filth;  
 Still, folk who wiped the unsavoury salute  
 From visage, would prefer the mess to wit—  
 Steel, poked through midriff with a civil speech,  
 As now the way is: then, the kindlier mode  
 Was—drub not stab, ribroast not scarify!

So did Sousarion introduce, and so  
Did I, acceding, find the Comic Art:  
Club,—if I call it,—notice what 's implied!  
An engine proper for rough chastisement,  
No downright slaying: with impunity—  
Provided crabtree, steeped in oily joke,  
Deal only such a bruise as laughter cures.  
I kept the gained advantage: stickled still  
For club-law—stout fun and allowanced thumps:  
Knocked in each knob a crevice to hold joke  
As fig-leaf holds the fat-fry.

‘Next, whom thrash?

Only the coarse fool and the clownish knave?  
Higher, more artificial, composite  
Offence should prove my prowess, eye and arm!  
Not who robs henroost, tells of untaxed figs,  
Spends all his substance on stewed ellops-fish,  
Or gives a pheasant to his neighbour's wife:  
No! strike malpractice that affects the State,  
The common weal—intriguer or poltroon,  
Venality, corruption, what care I  
If shrewd or witless merely?—so the thing  
Lay sap to aught that made Athenai bright  
And happy, change her customs, lead astray  
Youth or age, play the demagogue at Pnux,  
The sophist in Palaistra, or—what 's worst,  
As widest mischief,—from the Theatre  
Preach innovation, bring contempt on oaths,  
Adorn licentiousness, despise the Cult.  
Are such to be my game? Why, then there wants  
Quite other cunning than a cudgel-sweep!  
Grasp the old stout stock, but new tip with steel  
Each boss, if I would bray—no callous hide  
Simply, but Lamachos in coat of proof,  
Or Kleon cased about with impudence!  
Shaft pushed no worse while point pierced sparkling so  
That none smiled ‘Sportive, what seems savagest,  
—Innocuous anger, spiteless rustic mirth!’  
Yet spiteless in a sort, considered well,  
Since I pursued my warfare till each wound  
Went through the mere man, reached the principle  
Worth purging from Athenai. Lamachos?

No, I attacked war's representative;  
 Kleon? No, flattery of the populace;  
 Sokrates? No, but that pernicious seed  
 Of sophists whereby hopeful youth is taught  
 To jabber argument, chop logic, pore  
 On sun and moon, and worship Whirligig.  
 O your tragedian, with the lofty grace,  
 Aims at no other and effects as much?  
 Candidly: what 's a polished period worth,  
 Filed curt sententiousness of loaded line,  
 When he who deals out doctrine, primly steps  
 From just that selfsame moon he maunders of,  
 And, blood-thinned by his pallid nutriment,  
 Proposes to rich earth-blood—purity?  
 In me, 't was equal-balanced flesh rebuked  
 Excess alike in stuff-guts Glauketes  
 Or starveling Chairephon; I challenged both,—  
 Strong understander of our common life,  
 I urged sustainment of humanity.  
 Whereas when your tragedian cries up Peace—  
 He 's silent as to cheesecakes Peace may chew;  
 Seeing through rabble-rule, he shuts his eye  
 To what were better done than crowding Pnux—  
 That 's—dance "*Threttanelo*, the Kuklops drunk!"

'My power has hardly need to vaunt itself!  
 Opposers peep and mutter, or speak plain:  
 "No naming names in Comedy!" votes one,  
 "No vilifying live folk!" legislates  
 Another, "urge amendment on the dead!"  
 "Don't throw away hard cash," supplies a third,  
 "But crib from actor's dresses, choros-treats!"  
 Then Kleon did his best to bully me:  
 Called me before the Law Court: "Such a play  
 Satirized citizens with strangers there,  
 Such other,"—why, its fault was in myself!  
 I was, this time, the stranger, privileged  
 To act no play at all,—Egyptian, I—  
 Rhodian or Kameirensian, Aiginete,  
 Lindian, or any foreigner he liked—  
 Because I can't write Attic, probably!  
 Go ask my rivals,—how they roughed my fleece,  
 And how, shorn pink themselves, the huddled sheep



Sliver at distance from the snapping shears!  
 Why must they needs provoke me?

'All the same,

No matter for my triumph, I foretell  
 Subsidence of the day-star: quench his beams  
 No Aias e'er was equal to the feat  
 By throw of shield, tough-hided seven times seven,  
 'Twixt sky and earth! 't is dullards soft and sure  
 Who breathe against his brightest, here a sigh  
 And there a "So let be, we pardon you!"  
 Till the minute mist hangs a block, has tamed  
 Noonblaze to "twilight mild and equable,"  
 Vote the old women spinning out of doors.  
 Give me the earth-spasm, when the lion ramped  
 And the bull gendered in the brave gold flare!  
 O you shall have amusement,—better still,  
 Instruction! no more horse-play, naming names,  
 Taxing the fancy when plain sense will serve!  
 Thearion, now, my friend who bakes you bread,  
 What 's worthier limning than his household life?  
 His whims and ways, his quarrels with the spouse,  
 And how the son, instead of learning knead  
 Kilikian loaves, brings heart-break on his sire  
 By buying horseflesh branded *San*, each flank,  
 From shrewd Menippos who imports the ware:  
 While pretty daughter Kepphé too much haunts  
 The shop of Sporgilos the barber! brave!  
 Out with Thearion's meal-tub politics  
 In lieu of Pisthetairos, Strepsiades!  
 That 's your exchange? O Muse of Megara!  
 Advise the fools "*Feed babe on weasel-lap*  
*For wild-boar's marrow, Cheiron's hero-pap,*  
*And rear, for man—Ariphrades, mayhap!*"  
 Yes, my Balaustion, yes, my Euthukles,  
 That 's *your* exchange,—who, foreigners in fact  
 And fancy, would impose your squeamishness  
 On sturdy health, and substitute such brat  
 For the right offspring of us Rocky Ones,  
 Because babe kicks the cradle,—crows, not mewls!

'Which brings me to the prime fault, poison-speck  
 Whence all the plague springs—that first feud of all

'Twixt me and you and your Euripides.  
"Unworld the world" frowns he, my opposite.  
I cry, "Life!" "Death," he groans, "our better Life!"  
Despise what is—the good and graspable,  
Prefer the out of sight and in at mind,  
To village-joy, the well-side violet-patch,  
The jolly club-feast when our field's in soak,  
Roast thrushes, hare-soup, pea-soup, deep washed down  
With Peparethian; the prompt paying off  
That black-eyed brown-skinned country-flavoured wench  
We caught among our brushwood foraging:  
On these look fig-juice, curdle up life's cream,  
And fall to magnifying misery!  
Or, if you condescend to happiness,  
Why, talk, talk, talk about the empty name  
While thing's self lies neglected 'neath our nose!  
I need particular discourtesy  
And private insult from Euripides  
To render contest with him credible?  
Say, all of me is outraged! one stretched sense.  
I represent the whole Republic,—gods,  
Heroes, priests, legislators, poets,—prone,  
And pummelled into insignificance,  
If will in him were matched with power of stroke.  
For see what he had changed or hoped to change?  
How few years since, when he began the fight,  
Did there beat life indeed Athenai through!  
Plenty and peace, then! Hellas thundersmote  
The Persian. He himself had birth, you say,  
That morn salvation broke at Salamis,  
And heroes still walked earth. Themistokles—  
Surely his mere back-stretch of hand could still  
Find, not so lost in dark, Odusseus?—he  
Holding as surely on to Herakles,—  
Who touched Zeus, link by link, the unruptured chain!  
Were poets absent? Aischulos might hail—  
With Pindaros, Theognis,—whom for sire?  
Homeros' self, departed yesterday!  
While Hellas, saved and sung to, then and thus,—  
Ah, people,—ah, lost antique liberty!  
We lived, ourselves, undoubted lords of earth:  
Wherever olives flourish, corn yields crop  
To constitute our title—ours such land!

Outside of oil and breadstuff,—barbarism!  
What need of conquest? Let barbarians starve!  
Devote our whole strength to our sole defence,  
Content with peerless native products, home,  
Beauty profuse in earth's mere sights and sounds,  
Such men, such women, and such gods their guard!  
The gods? he worshipped best who feared them most,  
And left their nature uninquied into,  
—Nature? their very names! pay reverence,  
Do sacrifice for our part, theirs would be  
To prove benignantest of playfellows.  
With kindly humanism they countenanced  
Our emulation of divine escapes  
Through sense and soul: soul, sense are made to use;  
Use each, acknowledging its god the while!  
Crush, grape, dance, drink, indulge, for Bacchos' sake!  
'T is Aphrodité's feast-day—frisk and fling,  
Provided we observe our oaths, and house  
Duly the stranger: Zeus takes umbrage else!  
Ah, the great time—had I been there to taste!  
Perikles, right Olumpian,—occupied  
As yet with getting an Olumpos reared  
Marble and gold above Akropolis,—  
Wisely so spends what thrifty fools amassed  
For cut-throat projects. Who carves Promachos?  
Who writes the Oresteia?

‘Ah, the time!

For, all at once, a cloud has blanched the blue,  
A cold wind creeps through the close vine-yard rank,  
The olive-leaves curl, violets crisp and close  
Like a nymph's wrinkling at the bath's first splash  
On breast. (Your pardon!) There's a restless change,  
Deterioration. Larks and nightingales  
Are silenced, here and there a gor-crow grim  
Flaps past, as scenting opportunity.  
Where Kimon passaged to the Boulé once,  
A starveling crew, unkempt, unshorn, unwashed,  
Occupy altar-base and temple-step,  
Are minded to indoctrinate our youth!  
How call these carrion kill-joys that intrude?  
“Wise men,” their nomenclature! Prodikos—  
Who scarce could, unassisted, pick his steps

From way Theseia to the Tripods' way,—  
 This empty noddle comprehends the sun,—  
 How he's Aigina's bigness, wheels no whit  
 His way from east to west, nor wants a steed!  
 And here's Protagoras sets wrongheads right,  
 Explains what virtue, vice, truth, falsehood mean,  
 Makes all we seemed to know prove ignorance  
 Yet knowledge also, since, on either side  
 Of any question, something is to say,  
 Nothing to 'stablish, all things to disturb!  
 And shall youth go and play at kottabos,  
 Leaving unsettled whether moon-spots breed?  
 Or dare keep Choes ere the problem's solved—  
 Why should I like my wife who dislikes me?  
 "But sure the gods permit this, censure that?"  
 So tell them! straight the answer's in your teeth:  
 "You relegate these points, then, to the gods?  
 What and where are they?" What my sire supposed,  
 And where yon cloud conceals them! "Till they 'scape  
 And scramble down to Leda, as a swan.  
 Europa, as a bull! why not as—ass  
 To somebody? Your sire was Zeus perhaps!,  
 Either—away with such ineptitude!  
 Or, wanting energy to break your bonds,  
 Stick to the good old stories, think the rain  
 Is—Zeus distilling pickle through a sieve!  
 Think thunder's thrown to break Theoros' head  
 For breaking oaths first! Meanwhile let ourselves  
 Instruct your progeny you prate like fools  
 Of father Zeus, who's but the atmosphere,  
 Brother Poseidon, otherwise called—sea,  
 And son Hephaistos—fire and nothing else!  
 Over which nothings there's a something still,  
 'Necessity,' that rules the universe  
 And cares as much about your Choes-feast  
 Performed or intermitted, as you care  
 Whether gnats sound their trump from head or tail!"  
 When, stupefied at such philosophy,  
 We cry—Arrest the madmen, governor!  
 Pound hemlock and pour bull's-blood, Perikles!—  
 Would you believe? The Olumpian bends his brow,  
 Scarce pauses from his building! "Say they thus?  
 Then, they say wisely. Anaxagoras,

I had not known how simple proves eclipse  
But for thy teaching! Go, fools, learn like me!"

'Well, Zeus nods: man must reconcile himself,  
So, let the Charon's-company harangue,  
And Anaxagoras be—as we wish!  
A comfort is in nature: while grass grows  
And water runs, and sesame pricks tongue,  
And honey from Brilesian hollow melts  
On mouth, and Bacchis's flavorful lip beats both,  
You will not be untaught life's use, young man?  
*Pho!* My young man just proves that panniered ass  
Said to have borne Youth strapped on his stout back,  
With whom a serpent bargained, bade him swap  
The priceless boon for—water to quench thirst!  
What's youth to my young man? In love with age,  
He Spartanizes, argues, fasts and frowns,  
Denies the plainest rules of life, long since  
Proved sound; sets all authority aside,  
Must simply recommence things, learn ere act,  
And think out thoroughly how youth should pass—  
Just as if youth stops passing, all the same!

'One last resource is left us—poetry!  
Vindicate nature, prove Plataian help,  
Turn out, a thousand strong, all right and tight,  
To save Sense, poet! Bang the sophist-brood  
Would cheat man out of wholesome sustenance  
By swearing wine is water, honey—gall,  
Saperdion—the Empousa! Panic-smit,  
Our juveniles abstain from Sense and starve:  
Be yours to disenchant them! Change things back!  
Or better, strain a point the other way  
And handsomely exaggerate wronged truth!  
Lend wine a glory never gained from grape,  
Help honey with a snatch of him we style  
The Muses' Bee, bay-bloom-fed Sophokles,  
And give Saperdion a Kimberic robe?

"I, his successor," gruff the answer grunts,  
"Incline to poetize philosophy,  
Extend it rather than restrain; as thus—  
Are heroes men? No more, and scarce as much.

Shall mine be represented. Are men poor?  
 Behold them ragged, sick, lame, halt and blind!  
 Do they use speech? Ay, street-terms, market-phrase!  
 Having thus drawn sky earthwards, what comes next  
 But dare the opposite, lift earth to sky?  
 Mere puppets once, I now make womankind,  
 For thinking, saying, doing, match the male.  
 Lift earth? I drop to, dally with, earth's dung!  
 —Recognize in the very slave—man's mate,  
 Declare him brave and honest, kind and true,  
 And reasonable as his lord, in brief,  
 I paint men as they are—so runs my boast—  
 Not as they should be: paint—what's part of man  
 —Women and slaves—not as, to please your pride,  
 They should be, but your equals, as they are.  
 O and the Gods! Instead of abject mien,  
 Submissive whisper, while my Choros cants  
 'Zeus,—with thy cubit's length of attributes,—  
 May I, the ephemeral, ne'er scrutinize  
 Who made the heaven and earth and all things there?'  
 Myself shall say" . . . Ay, Herakles may help!  
 Give me,—I want the very words,—attend!'

He read. Then 'Murder's out,—“There are no Gods,”  
 Man has no master, owns, by consequence,  
 No right, no wrong, except to please or plague  
 His nature: what man likes be man's sole law!  
 Still, since he likes Saperdion, honey, figs,  
 Man may reach freedom by your roundabout,  
 “Never believe yourselves the freer thence!  
 There are no gods, but there's 'Necessity,'—  
 Duty enjoined you, fact in figment's place,  
 Throned on no mountain, native to the mind!  
 Therefore deny yourselves Saperdion, figs  
 And honey, for the sake of,—what I dream,  
 A-sitting with my legs up!'

' Infamy!

The poet casts in calm his lot with these  
 Assailants of Apollon! Sworn to serve  
 Each grace, the Furies call him minister—  
 He, who was born for just that roseate world  
 Renounced so madly, where what's false is fact,



Where he makes beauty out of ugliness,  
Where he lives, life itself disguised for him  
As immortality—so works the spell,  
The enthusiastic mood which marks a man  
Muse-mad, dream-drunken, wrapt around by verse,  
Encircled with poetic atmosphere,  
As lark emballed by its own crystal song,  
Or rose enmisted by that scent it makes!  
No, this were unreality! the real  
He wants, not falsehood,—truth alone he seeks,  
Truth, for all beauty! Beauty, in all truth—  
That 's certain somehow! Must the eagle lilt  
Lark-like, needs fir tree blossom rose-like? No!  
Strength and utility charm more than grace,  
And what 's most ugly proves most beautiful.  
So much assistance from Euripides!

'Whereupon I betake me, since needs must,  
To a concluding—"Go and feed the crows!  
Do! Spoil your art as you renounce your life,  
Poetize your so precious system, do,  
Degrade the hero, nullify the god,  
Exhibit women, slaves and men as peers,—  
Your castigation follows prompt enough!  
When all 's concocted upstairs, heels o'er head,  
Down must submissive drop the masterpiece  
For public praise or blame: so, praise away,  
Friend Socrates, wife's-friend Kephisophon!  
Boast innovations, cramp phrase, uncouth song,  
Hard matter and harsh manner, gods, men, slaves  
And women jumbled to a laughing-stock  
Which Hellas shall hold sides at lest she split!  
Hellas, on these, shall have her word to say!

'She has it and she says it—there 's the curse!—  
She finds he makes the shag-rag hero-race,  
The noble slaves, wise women, move as much  
Pity and terror as true tragic types:  
Applauds inventiveness—the plot so new,  
The turn and trick subsidiary so strange!  
She relishes that homely phrase of life,  
That common town-talk, more than trumpet-blasts:  
Accords him right to chop and change a myth:

What better right had he, who told the tale  
 In the first instance, to embellish fact?  
 This last may disembellish yet improve!  
 Both find a block: this man carves back to bull  
 What first his predecessor cut to sphynx:  
 Such genuine actual roarer, nature's brute,  
 Intelligible to our time, was sure  
 The old-world artist's purpose, had he worked  
 To mind; this both means and makes the thing!  
 If, past dispute, the verse slips oily-bathed  
 In unctuous music—say, effeminate—  
 We also say, like Kutherea's self,  
 A lulling effluence which enswathes some isle  
 Where hides a nymph, not seen but felt the more.  
 That's Hellas' verdict!

'Does Euripides  
 Even so far absolved, remain content?  
 Nowise! His task is to refine, refine,  
 Divide, distinguish, subtilize away  
 Whatever seemed a solid planting-place  
 For foot-fall,—not in that phantasmal sphere  
 Proper to poet, but on vulgar earth  
 Where people used to tread with confidence.  
 There's left no longer one plain positive  
 Enunciation incontestable  
 Of what is good, right, decent here on earth.  
 Nobody now can say 'this plot is mine,  
 Though but a plethron square,—my duty!'—"Yours?  
 Mine, or at least not yours," snaps somebody!  
 And, whether the dispute be parent-right  
 Or children's service, husband's privilege  
 Or wife's submission, there's a snarling straight,  
 Smart passage of opposing "yea" and "nay,"  
 "Should," "should not," till, howe'er the contest end,  
 Spectators go off sighing—Clever thrust!  
 Why was I so much hurried to pay debt,  
 Attend my mother, sacrifice an ox,  
 And set my name down "for a trireme, good"?  
 Something I might have urged on t' other side!  
 No doubt, Chresphontes or Bellerophon  
 We don't meet every day; but Stab-and-stitch  
 The tailor—ere I turn the drachmas o'er

I owe him for a chiton, as he thinks,  
 I'll pose the blockhead with an argument!  
 'So has he triumphed, your Euripides!  
 Oh, I concede, he rarely gained a prize:  
 That's quite another matter! cause for that!  
 Still, when 't was got by Ions, Iophons,  
 Off he would pace confoundedly superb,  
 Supreme, no smile at movement on his mouth  
 Till Sokrates winked, whispered: but it broke!  
 And Aristullos jotted down the jest,  
 While Iophons or Ions, bay on brow,  
 Looked queerly, and the foreigners—like you—  
 Asked o'er the border with a puzzled smile  
 —“And so, you value Ions, Iophons,  
 Euphorions! How about Euripides?’  
 (Eh, brave bard's-champion? Does the anger boil?  
 Keep within bounds a moment,—eye and lip  
 Shall loose their doom on me, their fiery worst!)  
 What strangers? Archelaos heads the file!  
 He sympathizes, he concerns himself,  
 He pens epistle, each successless play:  
 “Athenai sinks effete; there's younger blood  
 In Makedonia. Visit where I rule!  
 Do honour to me and take gratitude!  
 Live the guest's life, or work the poet's way,  
 Which also means the statesman's: he who wrote  
 Erechtheus may seem rawly politic  
 At home where Kleophon is ripe; but here  
 My council-board permits him choice of seats.”

‘Now this was operating,—what should prove  
 A poison-tree, had flowered far on to fruit  
 For many a year,—when I was moved, first man,  
 To dare the adventure, down with root and branch.  
 So, from its sheath I drew my Comic steel,  
 And dared what I am now to justify.  
 A serious question first, though!

‘Once again!

Do you believe, when I aspired in youth,  
 I made no estimate of power at all,  
 Nor paused long, nor considered much, what lass  
 Of fighters I might claim to join, beside

That class wherewith I cast in company?  
Say, you—profuse of praise no less than blame—  
Could not I have competed—franker phrase  
Might trulier correspond to meaning—still,  
Competed with your Tragic paragon?  
Suppose me minded simply to make verse,  
To fabricate, parade resplendent arms,  
Flourish and sparkle out a Trilogy,—  
Where was the hindrance? But my soul bade “Fight!  
Leave flourishing for mock-foe, pleasure-time;  
Prove arms efficient on real heads and hearts!”  
How? With degeneracy sapping fast  
The Marathonian muscle, nerved of old  
To maul the Mede, now strung at best to help  
—How did I fable?—War and Hubbub mash  
To mincemeat Fatherland and Brotherhood,  
Pound in their mortar Hellas, State by State,  
That greed might gorge, the while frivolity  
Rubbed hands and smacked lips o’er the dainty dish!  
Authority, experience—pushed aside  
By any upstart who pleads throng and press  
O’ the people! “Think, say, do thus!” Wherefore, pray?  
“We are the people: who impugns our right  
Of choosing Kleon that tans hide so well,  
Huperbolos that turns out lamps so trim,  
Hemp-seller Eukrates or Lusikles  
Sheep-dealer, Kephalos the potter’s son,  
Diitriphes who weaves the willow-work  
To go round bottles, and Nausikudes  
The meal-man? Such we choose and more, their mates,  
To think and say and do in our behalf!”  
While sophistry wagged tongue, emboldened still,  
Found matter to propose, contest, defend,  
’Stablish, turn topsyturvy,—all the same,  
No matter what, provided the result  
Were something new in place of something old,—  
Set wagging by pure insolence of soul  
Which needs must pry into, have warrant for  
Each right, each privilege good policy  
Protects from curious eye and prating mouth!  
Everywhere lust to shape the world anew,  
Spurn this Athenai as we find her, build  
A new impossible Cloundcuckooburg

For feather-headed birds, once solid men,  
Where rules, discarding jolly habitude,  
Nourished on myrtle-berries and stray ants,  
King Tereus who, turned Hoopoe Triple-Crest,  
Shall terrify and bring the gods to terms!

‘Where was I? Oh! Things ailing thus—I ask,  
What cure? Cut, thrust, hack, hew at heap-on-heaped  
Abomination with the exquisite  
Palaistra-tool of polished Tragedy?  
Erechtheus shall harangue Amphiktuon,  
And incidentally drop word of weight  
On justice, righteousness, so turn aside  
The audience from attacking Sicily!—  
The more that Choros, after he recounts  
How Phrixos rode the ram, the far-famed Fleece,  
Shall add—at last fall of grave dancing-foot—  
“Aggression never yet was helped by Zeus!”  
That helps or hinders Alkibiades?  
As well expect, should Pheidias carve Zeus’ self  
And set him up, some half a mile away,  
His frown would frighten sparrows from your field!  
Eagles may recognize their lord, belike,  
But as for vulgar sparrows,—change the god  
And plant some big Priapos with a pole!  
I wield the Comic weapon rather—hate!  
Hate! honest, earnest, and directest hate—  
Warfare wherein I close with enemy,  
Call him one name and fifty epithets,  
Remind you his great grandfather sold bran,  
Describe the new exomion, sleeveless coat  
He knocked me down last night and robbed me of,  
Protest he voted for a tax on air?  
And all this hate—if I write Comedy—  
Finds tolerance, most like—applause, perhaps  
True veneration; for I praise the god  
Present in person of his minister,  
And pay—the wilder my extravagance—  
The more appropriate worship to the Power  
Adulterous, night-roaming, and the rest:  
Otherwise,—that originative force  
Of nature, impulse stirring death to life,  
Which, underlying law, seems lawlessness,

Yet is the outbreak which, ere order be,  
Must thrill creation through, warm stocks and stones.  
Phales Iacchos.

‘Comedy for me!

Why not for you, my Tragic masters? Sneaks  
Whose art is mere desertion of a trust!  
Such weapons lay to hand, the ready club,  
The clay-ball, on the ground a stone to snatch,—  
Arms fit to bruise the boar’s neck, break the chine  
O’ the wolf,—and you must impiously—despise?  
No, I’ll say, furtively let fall that trust  
Consigned you! ’T was not “take or leave alone,”  
But “take and, wielding, recognize your god  
In his prime attributes!” And though full soon  
You sneaked, subsided into poetry,  
Nor met your due reward, still,—heroize  
And speechify and sing-song and forgo  
Far as you may your function,—still its pact  
Endures, one piece of early homage still  
Exacted of you; after your three bouts  
At hoitytoity, great men with long words,  
And so forth,—at the end, must tack itself  
The genuine sample, the Satyric Play,  
Concession, with its wood-boys’ fun and freak,  
To the true taste of the mere multitude.  
Yet, there again! What does your Still-at-itch,  
Always-the-innovator? Shrugs and shirks!  
Out of his fifty Trilogies, some five  
Are somehow suited: Satyrs dance and sing,  
Try merriment, a grimly prank or two,  
Sour joke squeezed through pursed lips and teeth on edge,  
Then quick on top of toe to pastoral sport,  
Goat-tending and sheep-herding, cheese and cream,  
Soft grass and silver rillets, country-fare—  
When throats were promised Thasian! Five such feats,  
Then frankly off he threw the yoke: next Droll,  
Next festive drama, covenanted fun,  
Decent reversion to indecency,  
Proved—your “Alkestis”! There’s quite fun enough,  
Herakles drunk! From out fate’s blackening wave  
Calamitous, just zigzags some shot star,  
Poor promise of faint joy, and turns the laugh  
On dupes whose fears and tears were all in waste!



'For which sufficient reasons, in truth's name,  
I closed with whom you count the Meaner Muse,  
Classed me with Comic Poets who should weld  
Dark with bright metal, show their blade may keep  
Its adamantine birthright though a-blaze  
With poetry, the gold, and wit, the gem,  
And strike mere gold, unstiffened out by steel.  
Or gem, no iron joints its strength around,  
From hand of—posturer, not combatant!

'Such was my purpose: it succeeds, I say!  
Have not we beaten Killikratidas,  
Not humbled Sparté? Peace awaits our word,  
Spite of Theramenes, and fools his like.  
Since my previsions,—warranted too well  
By the long war now waged and worn to end—  
Had spared such heritage of misery,  
My after-counsels scarce need fear repulse.  
Athenai, taught prosperity has wings,  
Cages the glad recapture. Demos, see,  
From folly's premature decrepitude  
Boiled young again, emerges, from the stew  
Of twenty-five years' trouble, sits and sways,  
One brilliance and one balsam,—sways and sits  
Monarch of Hellas! ay and, sage again,  
No longer jeopardizes chieftainship,  
No longer loves the brutish demagogue  
Appointed by a bestial multitude  
But seeks out sound advisers. Who are they?  
Ourselves, of parentage proved wise and good!  
To such may hap strains thwarting quality,  
(As where shall want its flaw mere human stuff?)  
Still, the right grain is proper to right race;  
What 's contrary, call curious accident!  
Hold by the usual! Orchard-grafted tree,  
Not wilding, race-horse sired, not rouncey-born,  
Aristocrat, no sausage-selling snob!  
Nay, why not Alkibiades, come back  
Filled by the Genius, freed of petulance,  
Frailty,—mere youthfulness that 's all at fault,—  
Advanced to Perikles and something more?  
—Being at least our duly born and bred,—  
Curse on what chaunoprockt first gained his ear

And got his . . . well, once true man in right place,  
 Our commonalty soon content themselves  
 With doing just what they are born to do,  
 Eat, drink, make merry, mind their own affairs  
 And leave state-business to the larger brain.  
 I do not stickle for their punishment;  
 But certain culprits have a cloak to twitch,  
 A purse to pay the piper: flog, say I,  
 Your fine fantastics, paragons of parts,  
 Who choose to play the important! Far from side  
 With us, their natural supports, allies,—  
 And, best by brain, help who are best by birth  
 To fortify each weak point in the wall  
 Built broad and wide and deep for permanence  
 Between what's high and low, what's rare and vile,—  
 They cast their lot perversely in with low  
 And vile, lay flat the barrier, lift the mob  
 To dizzy heights where Privilege stood firm.  
 And then, simplicity become conceit,—  
 Woman, slave, common soldier, artisan,  
 Crazy with new-found worth, new-fangled claims,—  
 These must be taught next how to use their heads  
 And hands in driving man's right to mob's rule!  
 What fellows thus inflame the multitude?  
 Your Sokrates, still crying "Understand!"  
 Your Aristullos,—“Argue!” Last and worst,  
 Should, by good fortune, mob still hesitate,  
 Remember there's degree in heaven and earth,  
 Cry "Aischulos enjoined us fear the gods,  
 And Sophokles advised respect the kings!"  
 Why, your Euripides informs them—"Gods?  
 They are not! Kings? They are, but . . . do not I,  
 In Suppliants, make my Theseus,—yours, no more,—  
 Fire up at insult of who styles him King?  
 Play off that Herald, I despise the most,  
 As patronizing kings' prerogative  
 Against a Theseus proud to dare no step  
 Till he consult the people?"

‘Such as these—

Ah, you expect I am for strangling straight?  
 Nowise, Balaustion! All my roundabout  
 Ends at beginning, with my own defence.

I dose each culprit just with—Comedy.  
Let each be doctored in exact the mode  
Himself prescribes: by words, the word-monger—  
My words to his words,—my lies, if you like,  
To his lies. Sokrates I nickname thief,  
Quack, necromancer; Aristullos,—say,  
Male Kirké who bewitches and bewraps  
And changes folk to swine; Euripides,—  
Well, I acknowledge! Every word is false,  
Looked close at; but stand distant and stare through,  
All's absolute indubitable truth  
Behind lies, truth which only lies declare!  
For come, concede me truth's in thing not word,  
Meaning not manner! Love smiles "rogue" and  
"wretch"  
When "sweet" and "dear" seem vapid: Hate adopts  
Love's "sweet" and "dear" when "rogue" and "wretch"  
fall flat:  
Love, Hate—are truths, then, each, in sense not sound.  
Further: if Love, remaining Love, fell back  
On "sweet" and "dear,"—if Hate, though Hate the  
same,  
Dropped down to "rogue" and "wretch,"—each phrase  
were false.  
Good! and now grant I hate no matter whom  
With reason: I must therefore fight my foe,  
Finish the mischief which made enmity.  
How? By employing means to most hurt him  
Who much harmed me. What way did he do harm?  
Through word or deed? Through word? with word  
wage war!  
Word with myself directly? As direct  
Reply shall follow: word to you, the wise,  
Whence indirectly came the harm to me?  
What wisdom I can muster waits on such.  
Word to the populace which, misconceived  
By ignorance and incapacity,  
Ends in no such effect as follows cause  
When I, or you the wise, are reasoned with,  
So damages what I and you hold dear?  
In that event, I ply the populace  
With just such word as leavens their whole lump  
To the right ferment for my purpose. *They*

Arbitrate properly between us both?  
*They* weigh my answer with his argument,  
 Match quip with quibble, wit with eloquence?  
 All they attain to understand is—blank!  
 Two adversaries differ: which is right  
 And which is wrong, none takes on him to say,  
 Since both are unintelligible. Pooh!  
 Swear my foe's mother vended herbs she stole.,  
 They fall a-laughing! Add,—his household drudge  
 Of all-work justifies that office well,  
 Kisses the wife, composing him the play,—  
 They grin at whom they gaped in wonderment,  
 And go off—"Was he such a sorry scrub?  
 This other seems to know! we praised too fast!"  
 Why, then, my lies have done the work of truth,  
 Since "scrub," improper designation, means  
 Exactly what the proper argument  
 —Had such been comprehensible—proposed  
 To proper audience—were I graced with such—  
 Would properly result in; so your friend  
 Gets an impartial verdict on his verse  
 "The tongue swears, but the soul remains unsworn!"

'There, my Balaustion! All is summed and said.  
 No other cause of quarrel with yourself!  
 Euripides and Aristophanes  
 Differ: he needs must round our difference  
 Into the mob's ear; with the mob I plead.  
 You angrily start forward "This to me?"  
 No speck of this on you the thrice refined!  
 Could parley be restricted to us two,  
 My first of duties were to clear up doubt  
 As to our true divergence each from each.  
 Does my opinion so diverge from yours?  
 Probably less than little—not at all!  
 To know a matter, for my very self  
 And intimates—that's one thing; to imply  
 By "knowledge"—loosing whatso'er I know  
 Among the vulgar who, by mere mistake,  
 May brain themselves and me in consequence,—  
 That's quite another. "O the daring flight!  
 This only bard maintains the exalted brow,  
 Nor grovels in the slime nor fears the gods!"

Did *I* fear—I play superstitious fool,  
Who, with the due proviso, introduced,  
Active and passive, their whole company  
As creatures too absurd for scorn itself?  
Zeus? I have styled him—"slave, mere thrashing-  
block!"

I'll tell you: in my very next of plays,  
At Bacchos' feast, in Bacchos' honour, full  
In front of Bacchos's representative,  
I mean to make main-actor—Bacchos' self!  
Forth shall he strut, apparent, first to last,  
A blockhead, coward, braggart, liar, thief,  
Demonstrated all these by his own mere  
Xanthias the man-slave: such man shows such god  
Shamed to brute beastship by comparison!  
And when ears have their fill of his abuse,  
And eyes are sated with his pummelling,—  
My Choros taking care, by, all the while,  
Singing his glory, that men recognize  
A god in the abused and pummelled beast,—  
Then, should one ear be stopped of auditor,  
Should one spectator shut revolted eye,—  
Why, the Priest's self will first raise outraged voice  
'Back, thou barbarian, thou ineptitude!  
Does not most license hallow best our day,  
And least decorum prove its strictest rite?  
Since Bacchos bids his followers play the fool,  
And there's no fooling like a majesty  
Mocked at,—who mocks the god, obeys the law—  
Law which, impute but indiscretion to,  
And . . . why, the spirit of Euripides  
Is evidently active in the world!"

Do I stop here? No! feat of flightier force!  
See Hermes! what commotion raged,—reflect!—  
When imaged god alone got injury  
By drunkards' frolic! How Athenai stared  
Aghast, then fell to frenzy, fit on fit,—  
Ever the last the longest! At this hour,  
The craze abates a little; so, my Play  
Shall have up Hermes: and a Karion, slave,  
(Since there's no getting lower) calls our friend  
The profitable god, we honour so,  
Whatever contumely fouls the mouth—

Bids him go earn more honest livelihood  
 By washing tripe in well-trough—wash he does,  
 Duly obedient! Have I dared my best?  
 Asklepios, answer!—deity in vogue,  
 Who visits Sophokles familiarly,  
 If you believe the old man,—at his age,  
 Living is dreaming, and strange guests haunt door  
 Of house, belike, peep through and tap at times  
 When a friend yawns there, waiting to be fetched,—  
 At any rate, to memorize the fact,  
 He has spent money, set an altar up  
 In the god's temple, now in much repute.  
 That temple-service trust me to describe—  
 Cheaters and choused, the god, his brace of girls,  
 Their snake, and how they manage to snap gifts  
 "And consecrate the same into a bag,"  
 For whimsies done away with in the dark!  
 As if, a stone's throw from that theatre  
 Whereon I thus unmask their dupery,  
 The thing were not religious and august!

'Of Sophokles himself—nor word nor sign  
 Beyond a harmless parody or so!  
 He founds no anti-school, upsets no faith,  
 But, living, lets live, the good easy soul  
 Who,—if he saves his cash, unpoetlike,  
 Loves wine and—never mind what other sport,  
 Boasts for his father just a sword-blade-smith,  
 Proves but queer captain when the people claim,  
 For one who conquered with "Antigone,"  
 The right to undertake a squadron's charge,—  
 And needs the son's help now to finish plays,  
 Seeing his dotage calls for governance  
 And Iophon to share his property,—  
 Why, of all this, reported true, I breathe  
 Not one word—true or false, I like the man.  
 Sophokles lives and lets live: long live he!  
 Otherwise,—sharp the scourge and hard the blow!

'And what's my teaching but—accept the old,  
 Contest the strange! acknowledge work that's done,  
 Misdoubt men who have still their work to do!



Religions, laws and customs, poetries,  
Are old? So much achieved victorious truth?  
Each work was product of a life-time, wrung  
From each man by an adverse world: for why?  
He worked, destroying other older work  
Which the world loved and so was loth to lose,  
Whom the world beat in battle—dust and ash!  
Who beat the world, left work in evidence,  
And wears its crown till new men live new lives,  
And fight new fights, and triumph in their turn.  
I mean to show you on the stage: you'll see  
My Just Judge only venture to decide  
Between two suitors, which is god, which man,  
By thrashing both of them as flesh can bear.  
You shall agree,—whichever bellows first,  
He's human; who holds longest out, divine!  
That is the only equitable test.  
Cruelty? Pray, who pricked them on to court  
My thong's award? Must they needs dominate?  
Then I—rebel. Their instinct grasps the new?  
Mine bids retain the old: a fight must be,  
And which is stronger the event will show.  
O but the pain! Your proved divinity  
Still smarts all reddened? And the rightlier served!  
Was not some man's-flesh in him, after all?  
Do let us lack no frank acknowledgment  
There's nature common to both gods and men!  
All of them—spirit? What so winced was clay.  
Away pretence to some exclusive sphere  
Cloud-nourishing a sole selected few  
Fume-fed with self-superiority!  
I stand up for the common coarse-as-clay  
Existence,—stamp and ramp with heel and hoof  
On solid vulgar life, you fools disown.  
Make haste from your unreal eminence,  
And measure lengths with me upon that ground  
Whence this mud-pellet sings and summons you!  
I know the soul, too, how the spark ascends  
And how it drops apace and dies away.  
I am your poet-peer, man thrice your match.  
I too can lead an airy life when dead.  
Fly like Kinesias when I'm cloudward bound;  
But here, no death shall mix with life it mars.

'So, my old enemy who caused the fight,  
 Own I have beaten you, Euripides!  
 Or,—if your advocate would contravene,—  
 Help him, Balaustion! Use the rosy strength!  
 I have not done my utmost,—treated you  
 As I might Aristullos, mint-perfumed,—  
 Still, let the whole rage burst in brave attack!  
 Don't pay the poor ambiguous compliment  
 Of fearing any pearl-white knuckled fist  
 Will damage this broad buttress of a brow!  
 Fancy yourself my Aristonumos,  
 Ameipsias or Sannurion: punch and pound!  
 Three cuckoos who cry "cuckoo"! much I care!  
 They boil a stone! *Neblaretai! Rattei!*'

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Cannot your task have end here, Euthukles?  
 Day by day glides our galley on its path:  
 Still sunrise and still sunset, Rhodes half-reached,  
 And still, my patient scribe! no sunset's peace  
 Descends more punctual than that brow's incline  
 O'er tablets which your serviceable hand  
 Prepares to trace. Why treasure up, forsooth,  
 These relics of a night that make me rich,  
 But, half-remembered merely, leave so poor  
 Each stranger to Athenai and her past?  
 For—how remembered! As some greedy hind  
 Persuades a honeycomb, beyond the due,  
 To yield its hoarding,—heedless what alloy  
 Of the poor bee's own substance taints the gold  
 Which, unforced, yields few drops, but purity,  
 So would you fain relieve of load this brain,  
 Though the hived thoughts must bring away, with  
 strength,  
 What words and weakness, strength's receptacle—  
 Wax from the store! Yet,—aching soothed away,—  
 Accept the compound! No suspected scent  
 But proves some rose was rifled, though its ghost  
 Scarce lingers with what promised musk and myrrh.

No need of farther squeezing. What remains  
Can only be Balaustion, just her speech.

Ah, but—because speech serves a purpose still!—

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He ended with that flourish. I replied,

Fancy myself your Aristonumos?  
Advise me, rather, to remain myself,  
Balaustion,—mindful what mere mouse confronts  
The forest-monarch Aristophanes!  
I who, a woman, claim no quality  
Beside the love of all things lovable  
Created by a power pre-eminent  
In knowledge, as in love I stand perchance,  
—You, the consummately-creative! How  
Should I, then, dare deny submissive trust  
To any process aiming at result  
Such as you say your songs are pregnant with?  
Result, all judge: means, let none scrutinize  
Save those aware how glory best is gained  
By daring means to end, ashamed of shame,  
Constant in faith that only good works good,  
While evil yields no fruit but impotence!  
Graced with such plain good, I accept the means.  
Nay, if result itself in turn become  
Means,—who shall say?—to ends still loftier yet,—  
Though still the good prove hard to understand,  
The bad still seemingly predominate,—  
Never may I forget which order bears  
The burden, toils to win the great reward,  
And finds, in failure, the grave punishment,  
So, meantime, claims of me a faith I yield!  
Moreover, a mere woman, I recoil  
From what may prove man's work permissible,  
Imperative. Rough strokes surprise: what then?  
Some lusty armsweep needs must cause the crash  
Of thorn and bramble, ere those shrubs, those flowers,  
We fain would have earth yield exclusively,  
Are sown, matured and garlanded for boys  
And girls, who know not how the growth was gained.

Finally, am I not a foreigner?  
No born and bred Athenian,—isled about,  
I scarce can drink, like you, at every breath,  
Just some particular doctrine which may best  
Explain the strange thing I revolt against—  
How—by involvement, who may extricate?—  
Religion perks up through impiety,  
Law leers with licence, folly wise-like frowns,  
The seemly lurks inside the abominable.  
But opposites,—each neutralizes each  
Haply by mixture: what should promise death,  
May haply give the good ingredient force,  
Disperse in fume the antagonistic ill.  
This institution, therefore,—Comedy,—  
By origin, a rite,—by exercise,  
Proved an achievement tasking poet's power  
To utmost, eking legislation out  
Beyond the legislator's faculty,  
Playing the censor where the moralist  
Declines his function, far too dignified  
For dealing with minute absurdities:  
By efficacy,—virtue's guard, the scourge  
Of vice, each folly's fly-flap, arm in aid  
Of all that's religious, customary, sound  
And wholesome; sanctioned therefore,—better say,  
Prescribed for fit acceptance of this age  
By, not alone the long recorded roll  
Of earlier triumphs but, success to-day—  
(The multitude as prompt recipient still  
Of good gay teaching from that monitor  
They crowned this morning—Aristophanes—  
As when Sousarion's car first traversed street)  
This product of Athenai—I dispute,  
Impugn? There's just one only circumstance  
Explains that! I, poor critic, see, hear, feel;  
But eyes, ears, senses prove me—foreigner!  
Who shall gainsay that the raw new-come guest  
Blames oft, too sensitive? On every side  
Of—larger than your stage—life's spectacle,  
Convention here permits and there forbids  
Impulse and action, nor alleges more  
Than some mysterious 'So do all, and so  
Does no one': which the hasty stranger blames

Because, who bends the head unquestioning,  
Transgresses, turns to wrong what else were right,  
By failure of a reference to law  
Beyond convention; blames unjustly, too—  
As if, through that defect, all gained were lost  
And slave-brand set on brow indelibly;—  
Blames unobservant or experienceless  
That men, like trees, if stout and sound and sane,  
Show stem no more affected at the root  
By bough's exceptional submissive dip  
Of leaf and bell, light danced at end of spray  
To windy fitfulness in wayward sport—  
No more lie prostrate—than low files of flower  
Which, when the blast goes by, unruffled raise  
Each head again o'er ruder meadow-wreck  
Of thorn and thistle that refractory  
Demurred to cower at passing wind's caprice.  
Why shall not guest extend like charity,  
Conceive how,—even when astounded most  
That natives seem to acquiesce in muck  
Changed by prescription, they affirm, to gold,—  
Such may still bring to test, still bear away  
Safely and surely much of good and true  
Though latent ore, themselves unspecked, unspoiled?  
Fresh bathed i' the icebrook, any hand may pass  
A placid moment through the lamp's fierce flame:  
And who has read your Lemnians seen The Hours,  
Heard Female-Playhouse-seat-Preoccupants,  
May feel no worse effect than, once a year,  
Those who leave decent vesture, dress in rags  
And play the mendicant, conform thereby  
To country's rite, and then, no beggar-taint  
Retained, don vesture due next morrow-day.  
What if I share the stranger's weakness then?  
Well, could I also show his strength, his sense  
Untutored, ay!—but then untampered with!

I fancy, though the world seems old enough,  
Though Hellas be the sole unbarbarous land,  
Years may conduct to such extreme of age,  
And outside Hellas so isles new may lurk,  
That haply,—when and where remain a dream!—  
In fresh days when no Hellas fills the world,

In novel lands as strange where, all the same,  
Their men and women yet behold, as we,  
Blue heaven, black earth, and love, hate, hope and fear,  
Over again, unhelped by Attiké—  
Haply some philanthropic god steers bark,  
Gift-laden, to the lonely ignorance  
Islanded, say, where mist and snow mass hard  
To metal—ay, those Kassiterides!  
Then asks: 'Ye apprehend the human form.  
What of this statue, made to Pheidias' mind,  
This picture, as it pleased our Zeuxis paint?  
Ye too feel truth, love beauty: judge of these!'  
Such strangers may judge feebly, stranger-like:  
'Each hair too indistinct—for, see our own!  
Hands, not skin-coloured as these hands we have,  
And lo, the want of due decorum here!  
A citizen, arrayed in civic garb,  
Just as he walked your streets apparently,  
Yet wears no sword by side, adventures thus,  
In thronged Athenai! foolish painter's-freak!  
While here 's his brother-sculptor found at fault  
Still more egregiously, who shames the world,  
Shows wrestler, wrestling at the public games,  
Atrociously exposed from head to foot!'  
Sure, the Immortal would impart at once  
Our slow-stored knowledge, how small truths suppressed  
Conduce to the far greater truth's display,—  
Would replace simple by instructed sense,  
And teach them how Athenai first so tamed  
The natural fierceness that her progeny  
Discarded arms nor feared the beast in man:  
Wherefore at games, where earth's wise gratitude,  
Proved by responsive culture, claimed the prize  
For man's mind, body, each in excellence,—  
When mind had bared itself, came body's turn,  
And only irreligion grudged the gods  
One naked glory of their master-work  
Where all is glorious rightly understood,—  
The human frame; enough that man mistakes:  
Let him not think the gods mistaken too!  
But, peradventure, if the stranger's eye  
Detected . . . Ah, too high my fancy-flight!  
Pheidias, forgive, and Zeuxis bear with me—



How on your faultless should I fasten fault  
Of my own framing, even? Only say,—  
Suppose the impossible were realized,  
And some as patent incongruity,  
Unseemliness,—of no more warrant, there  
And then, than now and here, whate'er the time  
And place,—I say, the Immortal—who can doubt?—  
Would never shrink, but own 'The blot escaped  
Our artist: thus he shows humanity.'

May stranger tax one peccant part in thee  
Poet, three-parts divine? May I proceed?

'Comedy is prescription and a rite.'  
Since when? No growth of the blind antique time,  
'It rose in Attiké with liberty;  
When freedom falls, it too will fall.' Scarce so!  
Your games,—the Olympian, Zeus, gave birth to these;  
Your Pythian,—these were Phoibos' institute.  
Isthmian, Nemeian,—Theseus, Herakles  
Appointed each, the boys and barbers say!  
Earth's day is growing late: where 's Comedy  
'Oh, that commenced an age since,—two, belike,—  
In Megara, whence here they brought the thing!  
Or I misunderstand, or here 's the fact—  
Your grandsire could recall that rustic song,  
How suchanone was thief, and miser such  
And how,—immunity from chastisement  
Once promised to bold singers of the same  
By daylight on the drunkard's holiday,—  
The clever fellow of the joyous troop  
Tried acting what before he sang about,  
Acted and stole, or hoarded, acting too:  
While his companions ranged a-row, closed up  
For Choros,—bade the general rabblement  
Sit, see, hear, laugh,—not join the dance themselves.  
Soon, the same clever fellow found a mate,  
And these two did the whole stage-mimicking,  
Still closer in approach to Tragedy,—  
So led the way to Aristophanes,  
Whose grandsire saw Sousarion, and whose sire—  
Chionides; yourself wrote 'Banqueters'  
When Aischulos had made 'Prometheus,' nay,

All of the marvels; Sophokles,—I'll cite,  
 'Oidipous'—and Euripides—I bend  
 The head—'Medeia' henceforth awed the world!  
 'Banqueters,' 'Babylonians'—next come you!  
 Surely the great days that left Hellas free  
 Happened before such advent of huge help,  
 Eighty-years-late assistance? Marathon,  
 Plataia, Salamis were fought, I think,  
 Before new educators stood reproved,  
 Or foreign legates blushed, excepted to!  
 Where did the helpful rite pretend its rise?  
 Did it break forth, as gifts divine are wont,  
 Plainly authentic, incontestably  
 Adequate to the helpful ordinance?  
 Founts, dowered with virtue, pulse out pure from source;  
 'T is there we taste the god's benign intent:  
 Not when,—fatigued away by journey, foul  
 With brutish trampling,—crystal sinks to slime,  
 And lymph forgets the first salubriousness.  
 Sprang Comedy to light thus crystal-pure?  
 'Nowise!' yourself protest with vehemence;  
 'Gross, bestial, did the clowns' diversion break;  
 Every successor paddled in the slush;  
 Nay, my contemporaries one and all  
 Gay played the mudlark till I joined their game;  
 Then was I first to change buffoonery  
 For wit, and stupid filth for cleanly sense,  
 Transforming pointless joke to purpose fine,  
 Transfusing rude enforcement of home-law—  
 "Drop knave's-tricks, deal more neighbour-like, ye  
 boors!"—

With such new glory of poetic breath  
 As, lifting application far past use  
 O' the present, launched it o'er men's lowly heads  
 To future time, when high and low alike  
 Are dead and done with, while my airy power  
 Flies disengaged, as vapour from what stuff  
 It—say not, dwelt in—fitlier, dallied with  
 To forward work, which done,—deliverance brave,—  
 It soars away, and mud subsides to dust.  
 Say then, myself invented Comedy!'

So mouths full many a famed Parabasis!

Agreed! No more, then, of prescriptive use,  
Authorization by antiquity,  
For what offends our judgment! 'T is your work,  
Performed your way: not work delivered you  
Intact, intact producible in turn.  
Everywhere have you altered old to new—  
Your will, your warrant: therefore, work must stand  
Or stumble by intrinsic worth. What worth?  
Its aim and object! Peace you advocate,  
And war would fain abolish from the land:  
Support religion, lash irreverence,  
Yet laughingly administer rebuke  
To superstitious folly,—equal fault!  
While innovating rashness, lust of change,  
New laws, new habits, manners, men and things,  
Make your main quarry,—'oldest' meaning 'best.'  
You check the fretful litigation-itch,  
Withstand mob-rule, expose mob-flattery,  
Punish mob-favourites; most of all press hard  
On sophists who assist the demagogue,  
And poets their accomplices in crime.  
Such your main quarry: by the way, you strike  
Ignobler game, mere miscreants, snob or scamp,  
Cowardly, gluttonous, effeminate:  
Still with a bolt to spare when dramatist  
Proves haply unproficient in his art.  
Such aims—alone, no matter for the means—  
Declare the unexampled excellence  
Of their first author—Aristophanes!

Whereat—Euripides, oh, not thyself—  
Augustlier than the need!—thy century  
Of subjects dreamed and dared and done, before  
'Banqueters' gave dark earth enlightenment,  
Or 'Babylonians' played Prometheus here,—  
These let me summon to defend thy cause!  
Lo, as indignantly took life and shape  
Labour by labour, all of Herakles,—  
Palpably fronting some o'erbold pretence  
'Eurustheus slew the monsters, purged the world!'  
So shall each poem pass you and imprint  
Shame on the strange assurance. *You* praised Peace?  
Sing him full-face, Kresphontes! 'Peace' the theme?

'Peace, in whom depths of wealth lie,—of the blest  
 Immortals beauteousest,—  
 Come! for the heart within me dies away,  
 So long dost thou delay!  
 O I have feared lest old age, much annoy,  
 Conquer me, quite outstrip the tardy joy,  
 Thy gracious triumph-season I would see,  
 The song, the dance, the sport, profuse of crowns to be  
 But come! for my sake, goddess great and dear,  
 Come to the city here!  
 Hateful Sedition drive thou from our homes,  
 With Her who madly roams  
 Rejoicing in the steel against the life  
 That 's whetted—banish Strife!'

Shall I proceed? No need of next and next!  
 That were too easy, play so presses play,  
 Trooping tumultuous, each with instance apt,  
 Each eager to confute the idle boast.  
 What virtue but stands forth panegyriized,  
 What vice, unburned by stigma, in the books  
 Which bettered Hellas,—beyond graven gold  
 Or gem indenture, sung by Phoibos' self  
 And saved in Kunthia's mountain treasure-house—  
 Ere you, man, moralist, were youth or boy?  
 —Not praise which, in the proffer, mocks the praised  
 By sly admixture of the blameworthy  
 And enforced coupling of base fellowship,—  
 Not blame which gloats the while it frowning laughs,  
 'Allow one glance on horrors—laughable!'  
 This man's entire of heart and soul, discharged  
 Its love or hate, each unalloyed by each,  
 On objects worthy either; earnestness,  
 Attribute him, and power! but novelty?  
 Nor his nor yours a doctrine—all the world's!  
 What man of full-grown sense and sanity  
 Holds other than the truth,—wide Hellas through,—  
 Though truth, he acts, discredit truth he holds?  
 What imbecile has dared to formulate  
 'Love war, hate peace, become a litigant!'—  
 And so preach on, reverse each rule of right  
 Because he quarrels, combats, goes to law?  
 No, for his comment runs, with smile or sigh

According to heart's temper, 'Peace were best,  
 Except occasions when we put aside  
 Peace, and bid all the blessings in her gift  
 Quick join the crows, for sake of Marathon!'

'Nay,' you reply; for one, whose mind withstands  
 His heart, and, loving peace, for conscience' sake  
 Wants war,—you find a crowd of hypocrites  
 Whose conscience means ambition, grudge and greed.  
 On such, reproof, sonorous doctrine, melts  
 Distilled like universal but thin dew  
 Which all too sparsely covers country: dear,  
 No doubt, to universal crop and clown,  
 Still, each bedewed keeps his own head-gear dry  
 With upthrust *skiadeion*, shakes adroit  
 The droppings to his neighbour. No! collect  
 All of the moisture, leave unhurt the heads  
 Which nowise need a washing, save and store  
 And dash the whole condensed to one fierce spout  
 On some one evildoer, sheltered close,—  
 The fool supposed,—till you beat guard away,  
 And showed your audience, not that war was wrong,  
 But Lamachos absurd,—case, crests and all,—  
 Not that democracy was blind of choice,  
 But Kleon and Huperbolos were shams:  
 Not superstition vile, but Nikias crazed,—  
 The concrete for the abstract; that 's the way!  
 What matters Choros crying 'Hence, impure!'  
 You cried 'Ariphrades does thus and thus!'  
 Now, earnestness seems never earnest more  
 Than when it dons for garb—indifference;  
 So there 's much laughing: but, compensative;  
 When frowning follows laughter, then indeed  
 Scout innuendo, sarcasm, irony!—  
 Wit's polished warfare glancing at first graze  
 From off hard headpiece, coarsely-coated brain  
 O' the commonalty—whom, unless you prick  
 To purpose, what avails that finer pates  
 Succumb to simple scratching? Those—not these—  
 'T is Multitude, which, moved, fines Lamachos,  
 Banishes Kleon and burns Sokrates,  
 House over head, or, better, poisons him.  
 Therefore in dealing with King Multitude,

Club-drub the callous num-kulls! In and in  
Beat this essential consequential fact  
That here they have a hater of the three,  
Who hates in word, phrase, nickname, epithet  
And illustration, beyond doubt at all!  
And similarly, would you win assent  
To—Peace, suppose? You tickle the tough hide  
With good plain pleasure her concomitant—  
And, past mistake again, exhibit Peace—  
Peace, vintager and festive, cheesecake-time,  
Hare-slice-and-peasoup-season, household joy:  
Theoria's beautiful belongings match  
Opora's lavish condescendings: brief,  
Since here the people are to judge, you press  
Such argument as people understand:  
If with exaggeration—what care you?  
Have I misunderstood you in the main?  
No! then must answer be, such argument,  
Such policy, no matter what good love  
Or hate it help, in practice proves absurd,  
Useless and null: henceforward intercepts  
Sober effective blow at what you blame,  
And renders nugatory rightful praise  
Of thing or person. The coarse brush has daubed—  
What room for the fine limner's pencil-mark?  
Blame? You curse, rather, till who blames must blush—  
Lean to apology or praise, more like!  
Does garment, simpered o'er as white, prove grey?  
'Black, blacker than Acharnian charcoal, black  
Beyond Kimmerian, Stugian blackness black,'  
You bawl, till men sigh 'nearer snowiness!'  
What follows? What one faint-rewarding fall  
Of foe belaboured ne'er so lustily?  
Laugh Lamachos from out the people's heart?  
He died, commanding, 'hero,' say yourself!  
Gibe Nikias into privacy?—nay, shake  
Kleon a little from his arrogance  
By cutting him to shoe-sole-shreds? I think,  
He ruled his life long and, when time was ripe,  
Died fighting for amusement,—good tough hide!  
Sokrates still goes up and down the streets,  
And Aristullos puts his speech in book,  
When both should be abolished long ago.



Nay, wretchedest of rags, Ariphrades—  
You have been fouling that redoubtable  
Harp-player, twenty years, with what effect?  
Still he strums on, strums ever cheerily,  
And earns his wage,—‘Who minds a joke?’ men say.  
No, friend! The statues stand—mudstained at most—  
Titan or pygmy: what achieves their fall  
Will be, long after mud is flung and spent,  
Some clear thin spirit-thrust of lightning—truth!

Your praise, then—honey-smearing helps your friend,  
More than blame’s ordure-smirch hurts foe, perhaps?  
Peace, now, misunderstood, ne’er prized enough,  
You have interpreted to ignorance  
Till ignorance opes eye, bat-blind before,  
And for the first time knows Peace means the power  
On maw of pan-cake, cheese-cake, barley-cake,  
No stop nor stint to stuffing. While, in camp,  
Who fights chews rancid tunny, onions raw,  
Peace sits at cosy feast with lamp and fire,  
Complaisant smooth-sleeked flute-girls giggling gay.  
How thick and fast the snow falls, freezing War  
Who shrugs, campaigns it, and may break a shin  
Or twist an ankle! come, who hesitates  
To give Peace, over War, the preference?  
Ah, friend—had this indubitable fact  
Haply occurred to poor Leonidas,  
How had he turned tail on Thermopulai!  
It cannot be that even his few wits  
Were addled to the point that, so advised,  
Preposterous he had answered—‘Cakes are prime,  
Hearth-sides are snug, sleek dancing-girls have worth,  
And yet—for country’s sake, to save our gods  
Their temples, save our ancestors their tombs,  
Save wife and child and home and liberty,—  
I would chew sliced-salt-fish, bear snow—nay, starve,  
If need were,—and by much prefer the choice!’  
Why, friend, your genuine hero, all the while,  
Has been—who served precisely for your butt—  
Kleonumos that, wise, cast shield away  
On battle-ground; cried ‘Cake my buckler be,  
Embossed with cream-clot! peace, not war, I choose,  
Holding with Dikaiopolis!’ Comedy

Shall triumph, Dikaiopolis win assent,  
 When Miltiades shall next shirk Marathon,  
 Themistokles swap Salamis for—cake,  
 And Kimon grunt 'Peace, grant me dancing-girls!  
 But sooner, hardly! twenty-five years since,  
 The war began,—such pleas for Peace have reached  
 A reasonable age. The end shows all.  
 And so with all the rest you advocate!  
 'Wise folk leave litigation! 'ware the wasps!  
 Whoso loves law and lawyers, heliast-like,  
 Wants hemlock!' None shows that so funnily.  
 But, once cure madness, how comports himself  
 Your sane exemplar, what 's our gain thereby?  
 Philokleon turns Bdelukleon! just this change,—  
 New sanity gets straightway drunk as sow,  
 Cheats baker-wives, brawls, kicks, cuffs, curses folk,  
 Parades a shameless flute-girl, bandies filth  
 With his own son who cured his father's cold  
 By making him catch fever—funnily!  
 But as for curing love of lawsuits—faugh!

And how does new improve upon the old  
 —Your boast—in even abusing? Rough, may be—  
 Still, honest was the old mode. 'Call thief—thief!  
 But never call thief even—murderer!  
 Much less call fop and fribble, worse one whit  
 Than fribble and fop! Spare neither! beat your brains  
 For adequate invective,—cut the life  
 Clean out each quality,—but load your lash  
 With no least lie, or we pluck scourge from hand!  
 Does poet want a whipping, write bad verse,  
 Inculcate foul deeds? There 's the fault to flog!  
 You vow 'The rascal cannot read nor write,  
 Spends more in buying fish than Morsimos,  
 Somebody helps his Muse and courts his wife,  
 His uncle deals in crockery, and last,—  
 Himself 's a stranger!' That 's the cap and crown  
 Of stinging-nettle, that 's the master-stroke!  
 What poet-rival,—after 'housebreaker,'  
 'Fish-gorging,' 'midnight footpad' and so forth,—  
 Proves not, beside, 'a stranger'? Chased from charge  
 To charge, and, lie by lie, laughed out of court,—  
 Lo, wit's sure refuge, satire's grand resource—

All, from Kratinos downward—'strangers' they!  
Pity the trick 's too facile! None so raw  
Among your playmates but have caught the ball  
And sent it back as briskly to—yourself!  
You too, my Attic, are styled 'stranger'—Rhodes,  
Aigina, Lindos or Kemeiros,—nay,  
'T was Egypt reared, if Eupolis be right,  
Who wrote the comedy (Kratinos vows)  
Kratinos helped a little! Kleon's self  
Was nigh promoted Comic, when he haled  
My poet into court, and o'er the coals  
Hauled and re-hauled 'the stranger,—insolent,  
Who brought out plays, usurped our privilege!  
Why must you Comics one and all take stand  
On lower ground than truth from first to last?  
Why all agree to let folk disbelieve,  
So laughter but reward a funny lie?  
Repel such onslaughts—answer, sad and grave,  
Your fancy-fleerings—who would stoop so low?  
Your own adherents whisper,—when disgust  
Too menacingly thrills Logeion through  
At—Perikles invents this present war  
Because men robbed his mistress of three maids—  
Or—Sokrates wants burning, house o'er head,—  
'What, so obtuse, not read between the lines?  
Our poet means no mischief! All should know—  
Ribaldry here implies a compliment!  
He deals with things, not men,—his men are things—  
Each represents a class, plays figure-head  
And names the ship: no meaner than the first  
Would serve; he styles a trireme "Sokrates"—  
Fears "Sokrates" may prove unseaworthy  
(That 's merely—"Sophists are the bane of boys")  
Rat-riddled ("they are capable of theft"),  
Rotten or whatso'er shows ship-disease,  
("They war with gods and worship whirligig").  
You never took the joke for earnest? scarce  
Supposed mere figure-head meant entire ship,  
And Sokrates—the whole fraternity?'

This then is Comedy, our sacred song,  
Censor of vice, and virtue's guard as sure:  
Manners-instructing, morals' stop-estray,

Which, born a twin with public liberty,  
Thrives with its welfare, dwindles with its wane!  
Liberty? what so exquisitely framed  
And fitted to suck dry its life of life  
To last faint fibre?—since that life is truth.  
You who profess your indignation swells  
At sophistry, when specious words confuse  
Deeds right and wrong, distinct before, you say—  
(Though all that 's done is—dare veracity,  
Show that the true conception of each deed  
Affirmed, in vulgar parlance, 'wrong,' or 'right,'  
Proves to be neither, as the hasty hold,  
But, change your side, shoots light, where dark alone  
Was apprehended by the vulgar sense)  
You who put sophistry to shame, and shout  
'There 's but a single side to man and thing;  
A side so much more big than thing or man  
Possibly can be, that—believe 't is true?  
Such were too marvellous simplicity!'—  
Confess, those sophists whom yourself depict,  
(—Abide by your own painting!) what they teach,  
They wish at least their pupil to believe,  
And, what believe, to practise! Did *you* wish  
Hellas should haste, as taught, with torch in hand,  
And fire the horrid Speculation-shop?  
Straight the shop's master rose and showed the mob  
What man was your so monstrous Sokrates;  
Himself received amusement, why not they?  
Just as did Kleon first play magistrate  
And bid you put your birth in evidence—  
Since no unbadged buffoon is licensed here  
To shame us all when foreign guests may mock—  
Then,—birth established, fooling licensed you,—  
He, duty done, resumed mere auditor,  
Laughed with the loudest at his Lamia-shape,  
Kukloboros-roaring, and the camel-rest.  
Nay, Aristullos,—once your volley spent  
On the male-Kirké and her swinish crew,—  
PLATON,—so others call the youth we love,—  
Sends your performance to the curious king—  
'Do you desire to know Athenai's knack  
At turning seriousness to pleasantry?  
Read this! One Aristullos means myself.

The author is indeed a merry grig!  
Nay, it would seem as if yourself were bent  
On laying down the law 'Tell lies I must—  
Aforethought and of purpose, no mistake!  
When forth yourself step, tell us from the stage  
'Here you behold the King of Comedy—  
Me, who, the first, have purged my every piece  
From each and all my predecessors' filth,  
Abjured those satyr-adjuncts sewn to bid  
The boys laugh, satyr-jokes whereof not one  
Least sample but would make my hair turn grey  
Beyond a twelvemonth's ravage! I renounce  
Mountebank-clap-trap, such as firework-fizz  
And torchflare, or else nuts and barleycorns  
Scattered among the crowd, to scramble for  
And stop their mouths with; no such stuff shames me!  
Who,—what's more serious,—know both when to strike  
And when to stay my hand: once dead, my foe,  
Why, done my fighting! I attack a corpse?  
I spare the corpse-like even! punish age?  
I pity from my soul that sad effete  
Toothless old mumblor called Kratinos! once  
My rival,—now, alack, the dotard slinks  
Ragged and hungry to what hole's his home;  
Ay, slinks thro' byways where no passenger  
Flings him a bone to pick. You formerly  
Adored the Muses' darling: dotard now,  
Why, he may starve! O mob most mutable!  
So you harangued in person; while,—to point  
Precisely out, these were but lies you launched,—  
Prompt, a play followed primed with satyr-frisks,  
No spice spared of the stomach-turning stew,  
Full-fraught with torch-display, and barley-throw,  
And Kleon, dead enough, bedaubed afresh;  
While daft Kratinos—home to hole trudged he,  
Wrung dry his wit to the last vinous dregs,  
Decanted them to 'Bottle,'—beat, next year,—  
'Bottle' and dregs—your best of 'Clouds' and dew!  
Where, Comic King, may keenest eye detect  
Improvement on your predecessors' work  
Except in lying more audaciously?

Why—genius! That's the grandeur, that's the gold—



That's *you*—superlatively true to touch—  
 Gold, leaf or lump—gold, anyhow the mass  
 Takes manufacture and proves Pallas' casque  
 Or, at your choice, simply a cask to keep  
 Corruption from decay. Your rivals' hoard  
 May ooze forth, lacking such preservative:  
 Yours cannot—gold plays guardian far too well!  
 Genius, I call *you*: dross, your rivals share;  
 Ay, share and share alike, too! says the world,  
 However you pretend supremacy  
 In aught beside that gold, your very own.  
 Satire? 'Kratinos for our satirist!'

The world cries. Elegance? 'Who elegant  
 As Eupolis?' resounds as noisily.  
 Artistic fancy? Choros-creatures quaint?  
 Magnes invented 'Birds' and 'Frogs' enough,  
 Archippos punned, Hegemon parodied,  
 To heart's content, before you stepped on stage.  
 Moral invective? Eupolis exposed  
 'That prating beggar, he who stole the cup,'  
 Before your 'Clouds' rained grime on Sokrates;  
 Nay, what beat 'Clouds' but 'Konnos,' muck for mud?  
 Courage? How long before, well-masked, you poured  
 Abuse on Eukrates and Lusikles,  
 Did Telekleides and Hermippos pelt  
 Their Perikles and Kumon? standing forth,  
 Bareheaded, not safe crouched behind a name,—  
 Philonides or else Kallistratos,  
 Put forth, when danger threatened,—mask for face,  
 To bear the brunt,—if blame fell, take the blame,—  
 If praise . . . why, frank laughed Aristophanes  
 'They write such rare stuff? No, I promise you!'

Rather, I see all true improvements, made  
 Or making, go against you—tooth and nail  
 Contended with; 't is still Moruchides,  
 'T is Euthumenes, Surakosios, nay,  
 Argurrhios and Kinesias,—common sense  
 And public shame, these only cleanse your styel  
 Coerced, prohibited,—you grin and bear,  
 And, soon as may be, hug to heart again  
 The banished nastiness too dear to drop!  
 Krates could teach and practise festive song  
 Yet scorn scurrility; as gay and good,



Pherekrates could follow. *Who* loosed hold,  
Must let fall rose-wreath, stoop to muck once more?  
Did your particular self advance in aught,  
Task the sad genius—steady slave the while—  
To further—say, the patriotic aim?  
No, there's deterioration manifest  
Year by year, play by play! survey them all,  
From that boy's-triumph when 'Acharnes' dawned,  
To 'Thesmophoriazousai,'—this man's-shame!  
There, truly, patriot zeal so prominent  
Allowed friends' plea perhaps: the baser stuff  
Was but the nobler spirit's vehicle.  
Who would imprison, unvolatilize  
A violet's perfume, blends with fatty oils  
Essence too fugitive in flower alone;  
So, calling unguent—violet, call the play—  
Obscenity impregnated with 'Peace'!  
But here's the boy grown bald, and here's the play  
With twenty years' experience: where's one spice  
Of odour in the hog's-lard! what pretends  
To aught except a grease-pot's quality?  
Friend, sophist-hating! know,—worst sophistry  
Is when man's own soul plays its own self false,  
Reasons a vice into a virtue, pleads  
'I detail sin to shame its author'—not  
'I shame Ariphrades for sin's display!'  
'I show Opora to commend Sweet Home'—  
Not 'I show Bacchis for the striplings' sake!'

Yet all the same—O genius and O gold—  
Had genius ne'er diverted gold from use  
Worthy the temple, to do copper's work  
And coat a swine's trough—which abundantly  
Might furnish Phoibos' tripod, Pallas' throne!  
Had you, I dream, discarding all the base,  
The brutish, spurned alone convention's watch  
And ward against invading decency  
Disguised as license, law in lawlessness,  
And so, re-ordinating outworn rule,  
Made Comedy and Tragedy combine,  
Prove some new Both-yet-neither, all one bard,  
Euripides with Aristophanes  
Coöperant! this, reproducing Now

As that gave Then existence: Life to-day,  
This, as that other—Life dead long ago!  
The mob decrees such feat no crown, perchance,  
But—why call crowning the reward of quest?  
Tell him, my other poet,—where thou walk'st  
Some rarer world than e'er Ilissos washed!

But dream goes idly in the air. To earth!  
Earth's question just amounts to—which succeeds,  
Which fails of two life-long antagonists?  
Suppose my charges all mistake! assume  
Your end, despite ambiguous means, the best—  
The only! you and he, a patriot-pair,  
Have striven alike for one result—say, Peace!  
You spoke your best straight to the arbiters—  
Our people: have you made them end this war  
By dint of laughter and abuse and lies  
And postures of Opora? Sadly—No!  
This war, despite your twenty-five years' work,  
May yet endure until Athenai falls,  
And freedom falls with her. So much for you!  
Now, the antagonist Euripides—  
Has he succeeded better? Who shall say?  
He spoke quite o'er the heads of Kleon's crowd  
To a dim future, and if there he fail,  
Why, you are fellows in adversity.  
But that's unlike the fate of wise words launched  
By music on their voyage. Hail, Depart,  
Arrive, Glad Welcome! Not my single wish—  
Yours also wafts the white sail on its way,  
Your nature too is kingly. All beside  
I call pretension—no true potentate,  
Whatever intermediary be crowned,  
Zeus or Poseidon, where the vulgar sky  
Lacks not Triballo to complete the group.  
I recognize,—behind such phantom-crew,—  
Necessity, Creation, Poet's Power,  
Else never had I dared approach, appeal  
To poetry, power, Aristophanes!  
But I trust truth's inherent kingliness,  
Trust who, by reason of much truth, shall reign  
More or less royally—may prayer but push  
His sway past limit, purge the false from true!

Nor, even so, had boldness nerved my tongue  
But that the other king stands suddenly,  
In all the grand investiture of death,  
Bowing your knee beside my lowly head—  
Equals one moment!

Now, arise and go!  
Both have done homage to Euripides!

Silence pursued the words: till he broke out—

'Scarce so! This constitutes, I may believe,  
Sufficient homage done by who defames  
Your poet's foe, since you account me such;  
But homage-proper,—pay it by defence  
Of him, direct defence and not oblique,  
Not by mere mild admonishment of me!  
Defence? The best, the only! I replied.  
A story goes—When Sophokles, last year,  
Cited before tribunal by his son  
(A poet—to complete the parallel)  
Was certified unsound of intellect,  
And claimed as only fit for tutelage,  
Since old and doating and incompetent  
To carry on this world's work,—the defence  
Consisted just in his reciting (calm  
As the verse bore, which sets our heart a-swell  
And voice a-heaving too tempestuously)  
That choros-chant 'The station of the steed,  
Stranger! thou comest to,—Kolonos white!'  
Then he looked round and all revolt was dead.  
You know the one adventure of my life—  
What made Euripides Balaustion's friend.  
When I last saw him, as he bade farewell,  
'I sang another "Herakles,"' smiled he;  
'It gained no prize: your love be prize I gain!  
Take it—the tablets also where I traced  
The story first with stulos pendent still—  
Nay, the psalterion may complete the gift,  
So, should you croon the ode bewailing Age,  
Yourself shall modulate—same notes, same strings—  
With the old friend who loved Balaustion once.'  
There they lie! When you broke our solitude,

We were about to honour him once more  
By reading the consummate Tragedy.  
Night is advanced; I have small mind to sleep;  
May I go on, and read,—so make defence,  
So test true godship? You affirm, not I,  
—Beating the god, affords such test: *I* hold  
That when rash hands but touch divinity,  
The chains drop off, the prison-walls dispart,  
And—fire—he fronts mad Pentheus! Dare we try?

Accordingly I read the perfect piece.

# HERAKLES

## AMPHITRUON

Zeus' Couchmate,—who of mortals knows not me,  
Argive Amphitruon whom Alkaïos sired  
Of old, as Perseus him, I—Herakles?  
My home, this Thebai where the earth-born spike  
Of Sown-ones burgeoned: Ares saved from these  
A handful of their seed that stocks to-day  
With children's children Thebai, Kadmos built.  
Of these had Kreon birth, Menoikeus' child,  
King of the country,—Kreon that became  
The father of this woman, Megara,  
Whom, when time was, Kadmeians one and all  
Pealed praise to, marriage-songs with fluted help,  
While to my dwelling that grand Herakles  
Bore her, his bride. But, leaving Thebes—where I  
Abode perforce—this Megara and those  
Her kinsmen, the desire possessed my son  
Rather to dwell in Argos, that walled work,  
Kuklopiian city, which I fly, myself,  
Because I slew Elektruon. Seeking so  
To ease away my hardships and once more  
Inhabit his own land, for my return  
Heavy the price he pays Eurustheus there—  
The letting in of light on this choked world!  
Either he promised, vanquished by the goad  
Of Heré, or because fate willed it thus.  
The other labours—why, he toiled them through;  
But for this last one—down by Tainaros,  
Its mouth, to Haides' realm descended he  
To drag into the light the three-shaped hound  
Of Hell: whence Herakles returns no more.  
Now, there's an old-world tale, Kadmeians have,  
How Dirké's husband was a Lukos once,  
Holding the seven-towered city here in sway  
Before they ruled the land, white-steeded pair,

The twins Amphion, Zethos, born to Zeus,  
 This Lukos' son,—named like his father too,  
 No born Kadmeian but Euboeia's gift,—  
 Comes and kills Kreon, lords it o'er the land,  
 Falling upon our town sedition-sick.  
 To us, akin to Kreon, just that bond  
 Becomes the worst of evils, seemingly;  
 For, since my son is in the earth's abysms,  
 This man of valour, Lukos, lord and king,  
 Seeks now to slay these sons of Herakles,  
 And slay his wife as well,—by murder thus  
 Thinking to stamp out murder,—slay too me,  
 (If me 't is fit you count among men still,—  
 Useless old age) and all for fear lest these,  
 Grown men one day, exact due punishment  
 Of bloodshed and their mother's father's fate.  
 I therefore, since he leaves me in these domes,  
 The children's household guardian,—left, when earth's  
 Dark dread he underwent, that son of mine,—  
 I, with their mother, lest his boys should die,  
 Sit at this altar of the saviour Zeus  
 Which, glory of triumphant spear, he raised  
 Conquering—my nobly-born!—the Minuai.  
 Here do we guard our station, destitute  
 Of all things, drink, food, raiment, on bare ground  
 Couched side by side: sealed out of house and home  
 Sit we in a resourcelessness of help.  
 Our friends—why, some are no true friends, I see!  
 The rest, that are true, want the means to aid.  
 So operates in man adversity:  
 Whereof may never anybody—no,  
 Though half of him should really wish me well,—  
 Happen to taste! a friend-test faultless, that!

## MEGARA

Old man, who erst didst raze the Taphian town,  
 Illustriously, the army-leader, thou,  
 Of speared Kadmeians—how gods play men false!  
 I, now, missed nowise fortune in my sire,  
 Who, for his wealth, was boasted mighty once,  
 Having supreme rule,—for the love of which  
 Leap the long lances forth at favoured breasts,—



And having children too: and me he gave  
Thy son, his house with that of Herakles  
Uniting by the far-famed marriage-bed.  
And now these things are dead and flown away,  
While thou and I await our death, old man,  
These Herakleian boys too, whom—my chicks—  
I save beneath my wings like brooding bird.  
But one or other falls to questioning  
'O mother,' cries he, 'where in all the world  
Is father gone to? What's he doing? when  
Will he come back?' At fault through tender years,  
They seek their sire. For me, I put them off,  
Telling them stories; at each creak of doors,  
All wonder 'Does he come?'—and all a-foot  
Make for the fall before the parent knee.  
Now then, what hope, what method of escape  
Facilitatest thou?—for, thee, old man,  
I look to,—since we may not leave by stealth  
The limits of the land, and guards, more strong  
Than we, are at the outlets: not in friends  
Remain to us the hopes of safety more.  
Therefore, whatever thy decision be,  
Impart it for the common good of all!  
Lest now should prove the proper time to die,  
Though, being weak, we spin it out and live.

## AMPHITRUON

Daughter, it scarce is easy, do one's best,  
To blurt out counsel, things at such a pass.

## MEGARA

You want some sorrow more, or so love life?

## AMPHITRUON

I both enjoy life, and love hopes beside.

## MEGARA

And I; but hope against hope—no, old man!

## AMPHITRUON

In these delayings of an ill lurks cure.

## MEGARA

But bitter is the meantime, and it bites.

## AMPHITRUON

O there may be a run before the wind  
 From out these present ills, for me and thee,  
 Daughter, and yet may come my son, thy spouse!  
 But hush! and from the children take away  
 Their founts a-flow with tears, and talk them calm  
 Steal them by stories—sad theft, all the same!  
 For, human troubles—they grow weary too;  
 Neither the wind-blasts always have their strength  
 Nor happy men keep happy to the end:  
 Since all things change—their natures part in twain;  
 And that man's bravest, therefore, who hopes on,  
 Hopes ever: to despair is coward-like.

## CHOROS

These domes that overroof,  
 This long-used couch, I come to, having made  
 A staff my prop, that song may put to proof  
 The swan-like power, age-whitened,—poet's aid  
 Of sobbed-forth dirges—words that stand aloof  
 From action now: such am I—just a shade  
 With night for all its face, a mere night-dream—  
 And words that tremble too: howe'er they seem,  
 Devoted words, I deem.

O, of a father ye unfathered ones,  
 O thou old man, and thou whose groaning stuns—  
 Unhappy mother—only us above,  
 Nor reaches him below in Haides' realm, thy love!  
 —(Faint not too soon, urge forward foot and limb  
 Way-weary, nor lose courage—as some horse  
 Yoked to the car whose weight recoils on him  
 Just at the rock-ridge that concludes his course!  
 Take by the hand, the peplos, anyone  
 Whose foothold fails him, printless and fordone!  
 Aged, assist along me aged too,  
 Who,—mate with thee in toils when life was new,  
 And shields and spears first made acquaintanceship,—

Stood by thyself and proved no bastard-slip  
Of fatherland when loftiest glory grew.)—  
See now, how like the sire's  
Each eyeball fiercely fires!  
What though ill-fortune have not left his race?  
Neither is gone the grand paternal grace!  
Hellas! O what—what combatants, destroyed  
In these, wilt thou one day seek—seek, and find all void!  
Pause! for I see the ruler of this land,  
Lukos, now passing through the palace-gate.

## LUKOS

The Herakleian couple—father, wife—  
If needs I must, I question: 'must' forsooth?  
Being your master—all I please, I ask.  
To what time do you seek to spin out life?  
What hope, what help see, so as not to die?  
Is it you trust the sire of these, that 's sunk  
In Haides, will return? How past the pitch,  
Suppose you have to die, you pile the woe—  
Thou, casting, Hellas through, thy empty vaunts  
As though Zeus helped thee to a god for son;  
And thou, that thou wast styled our best man's wife!  
Where was the awful in his work wound up,  
If he did quell and quench the marshy snake  
Or the Nemeian monster whom he snared  
And—says, by throttlings of his arm, he slew?  
With these do you outwrestle me? Such feats  
Shall save from death the sons of Herakles  
Who got praise, being nought, for bravery  
In wild-beast-battle, otherwise a blank?  
No man to throw on left arm buckler's weight,  
Not he, nor get in spear's reach! bow he bore—  
True coward's-weapon: shoot first and then fly!  
No bow-and-arrow proves a man is brave,  
But who keeps rank,—stands, one unwinking stare  
As, ploughing up, the darts come,—brave is he.  
My action has no impudence, old man!  
Providence, rather: for I own I slew  
Kreon, this woman's sire, and have his seat.  
Nowise I wish, then, to leave, these grown up,  
Avengers on me, payment for my deeds.

## AMPHITRUON

As to the part of Zeus in his own child,  
Let Zeus defend that! As to mine, 't is me  
The care concerns to show by argument  
The folly of this fellow,—Herakles,  
Whom I stand up for! since to hear thee styled—  
Cowardly—that is unendurable.  
First then, the infamous (for I account  
Amongst the words denied to human speech,  
Timidity ascribed thee, Herakles!)  
This I must put from thee, with gods in proof.  
Zeus' thunder, I appeal to, those four steeds  
Whereof he also was the charioteer  
When, having shot down the earth's Giant-growth—  
(Never shaft flew but found and fitted flank)  
Triumph he sang in common with the gods.  
The Kentaur-race, four footed insolence—  
Go ask at Pholoé, vilest thou of Kings,  
*Whom* they would pick out and pronounce best man,  
If not my son, 'the seeming brave,' say'st thou!  
But Dirphus, thy Abantid mother-town,  
Question her, and she would not praise, I think!  
For there's no spot, where having done some good,  
Thy country thou mightst call to witness worth.  
Now, that all-wise invention, archer's-gear,  
Thou blamest: hear my teaching and grow sage!  
A man in armour is his armour's slave,  
And, mixed with rank and file that want to run,  
He dies because his neighbours have lost heart.  
Then, should he break his spear, no way remains  
Of warding death off,—gone that body-guard,  
His one and only; while, whatever folk  
Have the true bow-hand,—here's the one main good,—  
Though he have sent ten thousand shafts abroad,  
Others remain wherewith the archer saves  
His limbs and life, too,—stands afar and wards  
Away from flesh the foe that vainly stares  
Hurt by the viewless arrow, while himself  
Offers no full front to those opposite,  
But keeps in thorough cover: there's the point  
That's capital in combat—damage foe,  
Yet keep a safe skin—foe not out of reach

As you are! Thus my words contrast with thine,  
And such, in judging facts, our difference.  
These children, now, why dost thou seek to slay?  
What have they done thee? In a single point  
I count thee wise—if, being base thyself,  
Thou dread'st the progeny of nobleness.  
Yet this bears hard upon us, all the same,  
If we must die—because of fear in thee—  
A death 't were fit thou suffer at our hands,  
Thy betters, did Zeus rightly judge us all.  
If therefore thou art bent on sceptre-sway,  
Thyself, here—suffer us to leave the land,  
Fugitives! nothing do by violence,  
Or violence thyself shalt undergo  
When the gods' gale may chance to change for thee!  
Alas, O land of Kadmos,—for 't is thee  
I mean to close with, dealing out the due  
Revilement,—in such sort dost thou defend  
Herakles and his children? Herakles  
Who, coming, one to all the world, against  
The Minuai, fought them and left Thebes an eye  
Unblinded henceforth to front freedom with!  
Neither do I praise Hellas, nor shall brook  
Ever to keep in silence that I count  
Towards my son, craven of cravens—her  
Whom it behoved go bring the young ones here  
Fire, spears, arms—in exchange for seas made safe,  
And cleansings of the land—his labour's price.  
But fire, spears, arms,—O children, neither Thebes  
Nor Hellas has them for you! 'T is myself,  
A feeble friend, ye look to: nothing now  
But a tongue's murmur, for the strength is gone  
We had once, and with age are limbs a-shake  
And force a-flicker! Were I only young,  
Still with the mastery o'er bone and thew,  
Grasping first spear that came, the yellow locks  
Of this insulter would I bloody so—  
Should send him skipping o'er the Atlantic bounds  
Out of my arm's reach through poltroonery!

## CHOROS

Have not the really good folk starting-points  
For speech to purpose,—though rare talkers they?

## LUKOS

Say thou against us words thou towerest with!  
I, for thy words, will deal thee blows, their due.  
Go, some to Helikon, to Parnasos  
Some, and the clefts there! Bid the woodmen fell  
Oak-trunks, and, when the same are brought inside  
The city, pile the altar round with logs,  
Then fire it, burn the bodies of them all,  
That they may learn thereby, no dead man rules  
The land here, but 't is I, by acts like these!  
As for you, old sirs, who are set against  
My judgments, you shall groan for—not alone  
The Herakleian children, but the fate  
Of your own house beside, when faring ill  
By any chance: and you shall recollect  
Slaves are you of a tyranny that 's mine!

## CHOROS

O progeny of earth,—whom Ares sowed  
When he laid waste the dragon's greedy jaw—  
Will ye not lift the staves, right-hand supports,  
And bloody this man's irreligious head?  
Who, being no Kadmeian, rules,—the wretch,—  
Our easy youth: an interloper too!  
But not of me, at least, shalt thou enjoy  
Thy lordship ever; for my labour's fruit,—  
Hand worked so hard for,—have! A curse with thee,  
Whence thou didst come, there go and tyrannize!  
For never while I live shalt thou destroy  
The Herakleian children: not so deep  
Hides he below ground, leaving thee their lord!  
But we bear both of you in mind,—that thou,  
The land's destroyer, dost possess the land,  
While he who saved it, loses every right.  
I play the busybody—for I serve  
My dead friends when they need friends' service most?  
O right-hand, how thou yearnest to snatch spear  
And serve indeed! in weakness dies the wish,  
Or I had stayed thee calling me a slave,  
And nobly drawn my breath at home in Thebes  
Where thou exuldest!—city that 's insane,



Sick through sedition and bad government,  
Else never had she gained for master—thee!

## MEGARA

Old friends, I praise you: since a righteous wrath  
For friend's sake well becomes a friend. But no!  
On our account in anger with your lord,  
Suffer no injury! Hear my advice,  
Amphitruon, if I seem to speak aright.  
O yes, I love my children! how not love  
What I brought forth, what toiled for? and to die—  
Sad I esteem too; still, the fated way  
Who stiffens him against, that man I count  
Poor creature; us, who are of other mood,  
Since we must die, behoves us meet our death  
Not burnt to cinders, giving foes the laugh—  
To me, worse ill than dying, that! We owe  
Our houses many a brave deed, now to pay.  
Thee, indeed, gloriously men estimate  
For spear-work, so that unendurable  
Were it that thou shouldst die a death of shame.  
And for my glorious husband, where wants he  
A witness that he would not save his boys  
If touched in their good fame thereby? Since birth  
Bears ill with baseness done for children's sake,  
My husband needs must be my pattern here.  
See now thy hope—how much I count thereon!  
Thou thinkest that thy son will come to light:  
And, of the dead, who came from Hades back?  
But we with talk this man might mollify:  
Never! Of all foes, fly the foolish one!  
Wise, well-bred people make concession to!  
Sooner you meet respect by speaking soft.  
Already it was in my mind—perchance  
We might beg off these children's banishment;  
But even that is sad, involving them  
In safety, ay—and piteous poverty!  
Since the host's visage for the flying friend  
Has, only one day, the sweet look, 't is said.  
Dare with us death, which waits thee, dared or no!  
We call on thine ancestral worth, old man!  
For who outlabours what the gods appoint

Shows energy, but energy gone mad.  
Since what must—none e'er makes what must not be.

## CHOROS

Had any one, while yet my arms were strong,  
Been scorning thee, he easily had ceased.  
But we are nought, now; thine henceforth to see—  
Amphitruon, how to push aside these fates!

## AMPHITRUON

Nor cowardice nor a desire of life  
Stops me from dying: but I seek to save  
My son his children. Vain! I set my heart,  
It seems, upon impossibility.  
See, it is ready for the sword, this throat  
To pierce, divide, dash down from precipice!  
But one grace grant us, king, we supplicate!  
Slay me and this unhappy one before  
The children, lest we see them—impious sight!—  
Gasping the soul forth, calling all the while  
On mother and on father's father! Else,  
Do as thy heart inclines thee! No resource  
Have we from death, and we resign ourselves.

## MEGARA

And I too supplicate: add grace to grace,  
And, though but one man, doubly serve us both!  
Let me bestow adornment of the dead  
Upon these children! Throw the palace wide!  
For now we are shut out. Thence these shall share  
At least so much of wealth was once their sire's!

## LUKOS

These things shall be. Withdraw the bolts, I bid  
My servants! Enter and adorn yourselves!  
I grudge no peploi; but when these ye wind  
About your bodies,—that adornment done,—  
Then I shall come and give you to the grave.

## MEGARA

O children, follow this unhappy foot,  
Your mother's, into your ancestral home,

Where others have the power, are lords in truth,  
Although the empty name is left us yet!

## AMPHITRUON

O Zeus, in vain I had thee marriage-mate,  
In vain I called thee father of my child!  
Thou wast less friendly far than thou didst seem  
I, the mere man, o'ermatch in virtue thee  
The mighty god: for I have not betrayed  
The Herakleian children,—whereas thou  
Hadst wit enough to come clandestinely  
Into the chamber, take what no man gave,  
Another's place; and when it comes to help  
Thy loved ones, there thou lackest wit indeed!  
Thou art some stupid god or born unjust.

## CHOROS

Even a dirge, can Phoibos suit  
In song to music jubilant  
For all its sorrow: making shoot  
His golden plectron o'er the lute,  
Melodious ministrant.  
And I, too, am of mind to raise,  
Despite the imminence of doom,  
A song of joy, outpour my praise  
To him—what is it rumour says?—  
Whether—now buried in the ghostly gloom  
Below ground,—he was child of Zeus indeed,  
Or mere Amphitruon's mortal seed—  
To him I weave the wreath of song, his labour's meed.  
For, is my hero perished in the feat?  
The virtues of brave toils, in death complete,  
These save the dead in song,—their glory-garland meet!

First, then, he made the wood  
Of Zeus a solitude,  
Slaying its lion-tenant; and he spread  
The tawniness behind—his yellow head  
Enmuffled by the brute's, backed by that grin of dread.  
The mountain-roving savage Kentaur-race  
He strewed with deadly bow about their place,

Slaying with winged shafts: Peneios knew,  
Beauteously-eddyng, and the long tracts too  
Of pasture trampled fruitless, and as well  
Those desolated haunts Mount Pelion under,  
And, grassy up to Homolé, each dell  
Whence, having filled their hands with pine tree plunder,  
Horse-like was wont to prance from, and subdue  
The land of Thessaly, that bestial crew.  
The golden-headed spot-back'd stag he slew,  
That robber of the rustics: glorified  
Therewith the goddess who in hunter's pride  
Slaughters the game along Oinoé's side.  
And, yoked abreast, he brought the chariot-breed  
To pace submissive to the bit, each steed  
That in the bloody cribs of Diomede  
Champed and, unbridled, hurried down that gore  
For grain, exultant the dread feast before—  
Of man's flesh: hideous feeders they of yore!  
All as he crossed the Hebros' silver-flow  
Accomplished he such labour, toiling so  
For Mukenaian tyrant; ay, and more—  
He crossed the Melian shore  
And, by the sources of Amauros, shot  
To death that strangers' pest  
Kuknos, who dwelt in Amphanaia: not  
Of fame for good to guest!

And next, to the melodious maids he came,  
Inside the Hesperian court-yard: hand must aim  
At plucking gold fruit from the appled leaves,  
Now he had killed the dragon, backed like flame,  
Who guards the unapproachable he weaves  
Himself all round, one spire about the same.  
And into those sea-troughs of ocean dived  
The hero, and for mortals calm contrived,  
Whatever oars should follow in his wake.  
And under heaven's mid-seat his hands thrust he,  
At home with Atlas: and, for valour's sake,  
Held the gods up their star-faced mansionry.  
Also, the rider-host of Amazons  
About Maiotis many-streamed, he went  
To conquer through the billowy Euxin once,  
Having collected what an armament

Of friends from Hellas, all on conquest bent  
Of that gold-garnished cloak, dread girdle-chase!  
So Hellas gained the girl's barbarian grace  
And at Mukenai saves the trophy still—  
Go wonder there, who will!

And the ten thousand-headed hound  
Of many a murder, the Lernaian snake  
He burned out, head by head, and cast around  
His darts a poison thence,—darts soon to slake  
Their rage in that three-bodied herdsman's gore  
Of Erutheia. Many a running more  
He made for triumph and felicity,  
And, last of toils, to Haides, never dry  
Of tears, he sailed: and there he, luckless, ends  
His life completely, nor returns again.  
The house and home are desolate of friends,  
And where the children's life-path leads them, plain  
I see,—no step retraceable, no god  
Availing, and no law to help the lost!  
The oar of Charon marks their period,  
Waits to end all. Thy hands, these roofs accost!—  
To thee, though absent, look their uttermost!

But if in youth and strength I flourished still,  
Still shook the spear in fight, did power match will  
In these Kadmeian co-mates of my age,  
They would,—and I,—when warfare was to wage,  
Stand by these children; but I am bereft  
Of youth now, lone of that good genius left!

But hist, desist! for here come these,—  
Draped as the dead go, under and over,—  
Children long since,—now hard to discover,—  
Of the once so potent Herakles!  
And the loved wife dragging, in one tether  
About her feet, the boys together;  
And the hero's aged sire comes last!  
Unhappy that I am! Of tears which rise,—  
How am I all unable to hold fast,  
Longer, the aged fountains of these eyes!

## MEGARA

Be it so! Who is priest, who butcher here  
Of these ill-fated ones, or stops the breath  
Of me, the miserable? Ready, see,  
The sacrifice—to lead where Haidēs lives!  
O children, we are led—no lovely team  
Of corpses—age, youth, motherhood, all mixed!  
O sad fate of myself and these my sons  
Whom with these eyes I look at, this last time!  
I, indeed, bore you: but for enemies  
I brought you up to be a laughing-stock,  
Matter for merriment, destruction-stuff!  
Woe's me!  
Strangely indeed my hopes have struck me down  
From what I used to hope about you once—  
The expectation from your father's talk!  
For thee, now, thy dead sire dealt Argos to:  
Thou wast to have Eurustheus' house one day,  
And rule Pelasgia where the fine fruits grow;  
And, for a stole of state, he wrapped about  
Thy head with that the lion-monster bore,  
That which himself went wearing armour-wise.  
And thou wast King of Thebes—such chariots there!  
Those plains I had for portion—all for thee,  
As thou hadst coaxed them out of who gave birth  
To thee, his boy: and into thy right hand  
He thrust the guardian-club of Daidalos,—  
Poor guardian proves the gift that plays thee false!  
And upon thee he promised to bestow  
Oichalia—what, with those far-shooting shafts,  
He ravaged once; and so, since three you were,  
With threefold kingdoms did he build you up  
To very towers, your father,—proud enough  
Prognosticating, from your manliness  
In boyhood, what the manhood's self would be.  
For my part, I was picking out for you  
Brides, suiting each with his alliance—this  
From Athens, this from Sparté, this from Thebes—  
Whence, suited—as stern-cables steady ship—  
You might have hold on life gods bless. All gone!  
Fortune turns round and gives us—you, the Fates  
Instead of brides—me, tears for nuptial baths,



Unhappy in my hoping! And the sire  
Of your sire—he prepares the marriage-feast  
Befitting Haides who plays father now—  
Bitter relationship! Oh me! which first—  
Which last of you shall I to bosom fold?  
To whom shall I fit close, his mouth to mine?  
Of whom shall I lay hold and ne'er let go?  
How would I gather, like the brown-winged bee,  
The groans from all, and, gathered into one,  
Give them you back again, a crowded tear!  
Dearest, if any voice be heard of men  
Dungeoned in Haides, thee—to thee I speak!  
Here is thy father dying, and thy boys!  
And I too perish, famed as fortunate  
By mortals once, through thee! Assist them! Come!  
But come! though just a shade, appear to me!  
For, coming, thy ghost-grandeur would suffice,  
Such cowards are they in thy presence, these  
Who kill thy children now thy back is turned!

## AMPHITRUON

Ay, daughter, bid the powers below assist!  
But I will rather, raising hand to heaven,  
Call thee to help, O Zeus, if thy intent  
Be, to these children, helpful anyway,  
Since soon thou wilt be valueless enough!  
And yet thou hast been called and called; in vain  
I labour: for we needs must die, it seems.  
Well, aged brothers—life's a little thing!  
Such as it is, then, pass life pleasantly  
From day to night, nor once grieve all the while!  
Since Time concerns him not about our hopes,—  
To save them,—but his own work done, flies off.  
Witness myself, looked up to among men,  
Doing noteworthy deeds: when here comes fate  
Lifts me away, like feather skyward borne,  
In one day! Riches then and glory,—whom  
These are found constant to, I know not. Friends  
Farewell! the man who loved you all so much,  
Now, this last time, my mates, ye look upon!

MEGARA

Ha!

O father, do I see my dearest? Speak!

AMPHITRUON

No more than thou canst, daughter—dumb like thee!

MEGARA

Is this he whom we heard was under ground?

AMPHITRUON

Unless at least some dream in day we see!

MEGARA

What do I say? what dreams insanely view?

This is no other than thy son, old sire!

Here, children! hang to these paternal robes,

Quick, haste, hold hard on him, since here 's your true  
Zeus that can save—and every whit as well!

HERAKLES

O hail, my palace, my hearth's propula,—

How glad I see thee as I come to light!

Ha, what means this? My children I behold

Before the house in garments of the grave,

Chapleted, and, amid a crowd of men,

My very wife—my father weeping too,

Whatever the misfortune! Come, best take

My station nearer these and learn it all!

Wife, what new sorrow has approached our home?

MEGARA

O dearest! light flashed on thy father now!

Art thou come? art thou saved and dost thou fall

On friends in their supreme extremity?

HERAKLES

How say'st thou? Father! what 's the trouble here?

MEGARA

Undone are we!—but thou, old man, forgive  
If first I snatch what thou shouldst say to him!  
For somehow womanhood wakes pity more.  
Here are my children killed and I undone!

HERAKLES

Apollon, with what preludes speech begins!

MEGARA

Dead are my brothers and old father too.

HERAKLES

How say'st thou?—doing what?—by spear-stroke  
whence?

MEGARA

Lukos destroyed them—the land's noble king!

HERAKLES

Met them in arms? or through the land's disease?

MEGARA

Sedition: and he sways seven-gated Thebes.

HERAKLES

Why then came fear on the old man and thee?

MEGARA

He meant to kill thy father, me, our boys.

HERAKLES

How say'st thou? Fearing what from orphanage?

MEGARA

Lest they should some day pay back Kreon's death.

HERAKLES

And why trick out the boys corpse-fashion thus?

MEGARA

These wraps of death we have already donned.

HERAKLES

And you had died through violence? Woe 's me!

MEGARA

Left bare of friends: and thou wast dead, we heard.

HERAKLES

And whence came on you this faintheartedness?

MEGARA

The heralds of Eurustheus brought the news.

HERAKLES

And why was it you left my house and hearth?

MEGARA

Forced thence; thy father—from his very couch!

HERAKLES

And no shame at insulting the old man?

MEGARA

Shame, truly! no near neighbours *he* and Shame!

HERAKLES

And so much, in my absence, lacked I friends?

MEGARA

Friends,—are there any to a luckless man?

HERAKLES

The Minuai-war I waged,—they spat forth these?

MEGARA

Friendless,—again, I tell thee,—is ill-luck.

## HERAKLES

Will not you cast these hell-wraps from your hair  
And look on light again, and with your eyes  
Taste the sweet change from nether dark to day?  
While I—for now there needs my handiwork—  
First I shall go, demolish the abodes  
Of these new lordships; next hew off the head  
Accurst and toss it for the dogs to trail.  
Then, such of the Kadmeians as I find  
Were craven though they owed me gratitude,—  
Some I intend to handle with this club  
Renowned for conquest; and with winged shafts  
Scatter the others, fill Ismenos full  
With bloody corpses,—Dirké's flow so white  
Shall be incarnadined. For, whom, I pray,  
Behoves me rather help than wife and child  
And aged father? Farewell, 'Labours' mine!  
Vainly I wrought them: my true work lay here!  
My business is to die defending these,—  
If for their father's sake they meant to die.  
Or how shall we call brave the battling it  
With snake and lion, as Eurustheus bade,  
If yet I must not labour death away  
From my own children? 'Conquering Herakles'  
Folk will not call me as they used, I think!  
The right thing is for parents to assist  
Children, old age, the partner of the couch.

## AMPHITRUON

True, son! thy duty is—be friend to friends  
And foe to foes: yet—no more haste than needs!

## HERAKLES

Why, father, what is over hasty here?

## AMPHITRUON

Many a pauper,—seeming to be rich,  
As the word goes,—the king calls partisan.  
Such made a riot, ruined Thebes to rob  
Their neighbour: for, what good they had at home  
Was spent and gone—flew off through idleness.

You came to trouble Thebes, they saw: since seen,  
Beware lest, raising foes, a multitude,  
You stumble where you apprehend no harm.

## HERAKLES

If all Thebes saw me, not a whit care I.  
But seeing as I did a certain bird  
Not in the lucky seats, I knew some woe  
Was fallen upon the house: so, purposely,  
By stealth I made my way into the land.

## AMPHITRUON

And now, advancing, hail the hearth with praise  
And give the ancestral home thine eye to see!  
For he himself will come, thy wife and sons  
To drag forth—slaughter—slay me too,—this king!  
But, here remaining, all succeeds with thee—  
Gain lost by no false step. So, this thy town  
Disturb not, son, ere thou right matters here!

## HERAKLES

Thus will I do, for thou say'st well; my home  
Let me first enter! Since at the due time  
Returning from the unsunned depths where dwells  
Haides' wife Koré, let me not affront  
Those gods beneath my roof I first should hail!

## AMPHITRUON

For didst thou really visit Haides, son?

## HERAKLES

Ay—dragged to light, too, his three-headed beast.

## AMPHITRUON

By fight didst conquer, or through Koré's gift?

## HERAKLES

Fight: well for me, I saw the Orgies first!

## AMPHITRUON

And is he in Eurustheus' house, the brute?



HERAKLES

Clithonia's grove, Hermion's city, hold 'him now.

AMPHITRUON

Does not Erustheus know thee back on earth?

HERAKLES

No: I would come first and see matters here.

AMPHITRUON

But how wast thou below ground such a time?

HERAKLES

I stopped, from Haides, bringing Theseus up.

AMPHITRUON

And where is he?—bound o'er the plain for home?

HERAKLES

Gone glad to Athens—Haides' fugitive!  
 But, up, boys! follow father into house!  
 There's a far better going-in for you  
 Truly, than going-out was! Nay, take heart,  
 And let the eyes no longer run and run!  
 And thou, O wife, my own, collect thy soul  
 Nor tremble now! Leave grasping, all of you,  
 My garments! I'm not winged, nor fly from friends  
 Ah,—

No letting go for these, who all the more  
 Hang to my garments! Did you foot indeed  
 The razor's edge? Why, then I'll carry them—  
 Take with my hands these small craft up, and tow  
 Just as a ship would. There! don't fear I shirk  
 My children's service! this way, men are men,  
 No difference! best and worst, they love their boys  
 After one fashion: wealth they differ in—  
 Some have it, others not; but each and all  
 Combine to form the children-loving race.

## CHOROS

Youth is a pleasant burthen to me;  
 But age on my head, more heavily  
 Than the crags of Aitna, weighs and weighs,  
 And darkening cloaks the lids and intercepts the rays.  
 Never be mine the preference  
 Of an Asian empire's wealth, nor yet  
 Of a house all gold, to youth, to youth  
 That 's beauty, whatever the gods dispense!  
 Whether in wealth we joy, or fret  
 Paupers,—of all God's gifts most beautiful, in truth!

But miserable murderous age I hate!  
 Let it go to wreck, the waves adown,  
 Nor ever by rights plague tower or town  
 Where mortals bide, but still elate  
 With wings, on ether, precipitate,  
 Wander them round—nor wait!

But if the gods, to man's degree,  
 Had wit and wisdom, they would bring  
 Mankind a twofold youth, to be  
 Their virtue's sign-mark, all should see,  
 In those with whom life's winter thus grew spring.  
 For when they died, into the sun once more  
 Would they have traversed twice life's racecourse o'er;  
 While ignobility had simply run  
 Existence through, nor second life begun.  
 And so might we discern both bad and good  
 As surely as the starry multitude  
 Is numbered by the sailors, one by one.  
 But now the gods by no apparent line  
 Limit the worthy and the base define;  
 Only, a certain period rounds, and so  
 Brings man more wealth,—but youthful vigour, no!

Well! I am not to pause  
 Mingling together—wine and wine in cup—  
 The Graces with the Muses up—  
 Most dulcet marriage: loosed from music's laws,  
 No life for me!  
 But where the wreaths abound, there ever may I be!

And still, an aged bard, I shout Mnemosuné—  
 Still chant of Herakles the triumphant-chant,  
 Companioned by the seven-stringed tortoise-shell  
 And Libuan flute, and Bromios' self as well,  
 God of the grape, with man participant!  
 Not yet will we arrest their glad advance—  
 The Muses who so long have led me forth to dance!  
 A paian—hymn the Delian girls indeed,  
 Weaving a beauteous measure in and out  
 His temple-gates, Latona's goodly seed;  
 And paians—I too, these thy domes about,  
 From these grey cheeks, my king, will swan-like shout—  
 Old songster! Ay, in song it starts off brave—  
 'Zeus' son is he!' and yet, such grace of birth  
 Surpassing far, to man his labours gave  
 Existence, one calm flow without a wave,  
 Having destroyed the beasts, the terrors of the earth.

## LUKOS

From out the house Amphitruon comes—in time!  
 For 't is a long while now since ye bedecked  
 Your bodies with the dead-folk's finery.  
 But quick! the boys and wife of Herakles—  
 Bid them appear outside this house, keep pact  
 To die, and need no bidding but your own!

## AMPHITRUON

King! you press hard on me sore-pressed enough,  
 And give me scorn—beside my dead ones here.  
 Meet in such matters were it, though you reign,  
 To temper zeal with moderation. Since  
 You do impose on us the need to die—  
 Needs must we love our lot, obey your will.

## LUKOS

Where 's Megara, then? Alkmené's grandsons, where?

## AMPHITRUON

She, I think,—as one figures from outside,—

## LUKOS

Well, this same thinking,—what affords its ground?

AMPHITRUON

—Sits suppliant on the holy altar-steps,—

LUKOS

Idly indeed a suppliant to save life!

AMPHITRUON

—And calls on her dead husband, vainly too!

LUKOS

For he 's not come, nor ever will arrive.

AMPHITRUON

Never—at least, if no god raise him up.

LUKOS

Go to her, and conduct her from the house!

AMPHITRUON

I should partake the murder, doing that.

LUKOS

We,—since thou hast a scruple in the case,—  
Outside of fears, we shall march forth these lads  
Mother and all. Here, follow me, my folk—  
And gladly so remove what stops our toils!

AMPHITRUON

Thou—go then! March where needs must! What  
remains—

Perhaps concerns another. Doing ill,  
Expect some ill be done thee!

Ha, old friends!

On he strides beautifully! in the toils  
O' the net, where swords spring forth, will he be fast—  
Minded to kill his neighbours—the arch-knave!  
I go, too—I must see the falling corpse!  
For he has sweets to give—a dying man,  
Your foe, that pays the price of deeds he did.

## CHOROS

Troubles are over! He the great king once  
Turns the point, tends for Haides, goal of life!  
O justice, and the gods' back-flowing fate!

## AMPHITRUON

Thou art come, late indeed, where death pays crime—  
These insults heaped on better than thyself!

## CHOROS

Joy gives this outburst to my tears! Again  
Come round those deeds, his doing, which of old  
He never dreamed himself was to endure—  
King of the country! But enough, old man!  
Indoors, now, let us see how matters stand—  
If somebody be faring as I wish!

## LUKOS

Ah me—me!

## CHOROS

This strikes the keynote—music to my mind,  
Merry i' the household! Death takes up the tune!  
The king gives voice, groans murder's prelude well!

## LUKOS

O, all the land of Kadmos! slain by guile!

## CHOROS

Ay, for who slew first? Paying back thy due,  
Resign thee! make, for deeds done, mere amends!  
Who was it grazed the gods through lawlessness—  
Mortal himself, threw up his fool's-conceit  
Against the blessed heavenly ones—as though  
Gods had no power? Old friends, the impious man  
Exists not any more! The house is mute.  
Turn we to song and dance! For, those I love,  
Those I wish well to, well fare they, to wish!

Dances, dances and banqueting  
To Thebes, the sacred city through,

Are a care! for, change and change  
 Of tears to laughter, old to new,  
 Our lays, glad birth, they bring, they bring!  
 He is gone and past, the mighty king!  
 And the old one reigns, returned—O strange!  
 From the Acherontian harbour too!  
 Advent of hope, beyond thought's widest range!  
 To the gods, the gods, are crimes a care,  
 And they watch our virtue, well aware  
 That gold and that prosperity drive man  
 Out of his mind—those charioteers who hale  
 Might-without-right behind them: face who can  
 Fortune's reverse which time prepares, nor quail?  
 —He who evades law and in lawlessness  
 Delights him,—he has broken down his trust—  
 The chariot, riches haled—now blackening in the dust!

Ismenos, go thou garlanded!  
 Break into dance, ye ways, the polished bed  
 O' the seven-gated city! Dirké, thou  
 Fair-flowing, with the Asopiad sisters all,  
 Leave your sire's stream, attend the festival  
 Of Herakles, one choir of nymphs, sing triumph now!  
 O woody rock of Puthios and each home  
 O' the Helikonian Muses, ye shall come  
 With joyous shouting to my walls, my town  
 Where saw the light that Spartan race, those 'Sown,'  
 Brazen-shield-bearing chiefs, whereof the band  
 With children's children renovates our land,  
 To Thebes a sacred light!  
 O combination of the marriage rite—  
 Bed of the mortal-born and Zeus, who couched  
 Beside the nymph of Perseus' progeny!  
 For credible, past hope, becomes to me  
 That nuptial story long ago avouched,  
 O Zeus! and time has turned the dark to bright,  
 And made one blaze of truth the Herakleidan might—  
 His, who emerged from earth's pavilion, left  
 Plouton's abode, the nether palace-cleft.  
 Thou wast the lord that nature gave me—not  
 That baseness born and bred—my king, by lot!  
 —Baseness made plain to all, who now regard  
 The match of sword with sword in fight,—



If to the gods the Just and Right  
Still pleasing be, still claim the palm's award.

Horror!

Are we come to the self-same passion of fear,  
Old friends?—such a phantasm fronts me here  
Visible over the palace-roof!  
In flight, in flight, the laggard limb  
Bestir! and haste aloof  
From that on the roof there—grand and grim!  
O Paian, king!  
Be thou my safeguard from the woeful thing!

#### IRIS

Courage, old men! beholding here—Night's birth—  
Madness, and me the handmaid of the gods,  
Iris: since to your town we come, no plague—  
Wage war against the house of but one man  
From Zeus and from Alkmené sprung, they say.  
Now, till he made an end of bitter toils,  
Fate kept him safe, nor did his father Zeus  
Let us once hurt him, Heré nor myself.  
But, since he has toiled through Eurustheus' task,  
Heré desires to fix fresh blood on him—  
Slaying his children: I desire it too.

Up then, collecting the unsoftened heart,  
Unwedded virgin of black Night! Drive, drag  
Frenzy upon the man here—whirls of brain  
Big with child-murder, while his feet leap gay!  
Let go the bloody cable its whole length!  
So that,—when o'er the Acherousian ford  
He has sent floating, by self-homicide,  
His beautiful boy-garland,—he may know  
First, Heré's anger, what it is to him,  
And then learn mine. The gods are vile indeed  
And mortal matters vast, if he 'scape free!

#### MADNESS

Certes, from well-born sire and mother too  
Had I my birth, whose blood is Night's and Heaven's;  
But here 's my glory,—not to grudge the good!

Nor love I raids against the friends of man.  
 I wish, then, to persuade,—before I see  
 You stumbling, you and Heré! trust my words!  
 This man, the house of whom ye hound me to,  
 Is not unfamed on earth nor gods among;  
 Since, having quelled waste land and savage sea,  
 He alone raised again the falling rights  
 Of gods—gone ruinous through impious men.  
 Desire no mighty mischief, I advise!

## IRIS

Give thou no thought to Heré's faulty schemes!

## MADNESS

Changing her step from faulty to fault-free!

## IRIS

Not to be wise, did Zeus' wife send thee here.

## MADNESS

Sun, thee I cite to witness—doing what I loathe to do!  
 But since indeed to Heré and thyself I must subserve.  
 And follow you quick, with a whizz, as the hounds  
 a-hunt with the huntsman,  
 —Go I will! and neither the sea, as it groans with its  
 waves so furiously,  
 Nor earthquake, no, nor the bolt of thunder gasping out  
 heaven's labour-throe,  
 Shall cover the ground as I, at a bound, rush into the  
 bosom of Herakles!  
 And home I scatter, and house I batter,  
 Having first of all made the children fall,—  
 And he who felled them is never to know  
 He gave birth to each child that received the blow,  
 Till the Madness, I am, have let him go!

Ha, behold! already he rocks his head—he is off from the  
 starting-place!  
 Not a word, as he rolls his frightful orbs, from their  
 sockets wrenched in the ghastly race!  
 And the breathings of him he tempers and times no more  
 than a bull in act to toss,

And hideously he bellows invoking the Keres, daughters  
of Tartaros.

Ay, and I soon will dance thee madder, and pipe thee  
quite out of thy mind with fear!

So, up with the famous foot, thou Iris, march to Olumpos,  
leave me here!

Me and mine, who now combine, in the dreadful shape  
no mortal sees,

And now are about to pass, from without, inside of the  
home of Herakles!

## CHOROS

Otototoi,—groan!

Away is mown

Thy flower, Zeus' offspring, City!

Unhappy Hellas, who dost cast (the pity!)

Who worked thee all the good,

Away from thee,—destroyest in a mood

Of madness him, to death whom pipings dance!

There goes she, in her chariot,—groans, her brood,—

And gives her team the goad, as though adrift

For doom, Night's Gorgon, Madness, she whose glance

Turns man to marble! with what hissings lift

Their hundred heads the snakes, her head's inheritance!

Quick has the god changed fortune: through their sire

Quick will the children, that he saved, expire!

O miserable me! O Zeus! thy child—

Childless himself—soon vengeance, hunger-wild,

Craving for punishment, will lay how low—

Loaded with many a woe!

O palace-roofs! your courts about,

A measure begins all unrejoiced

By the tympanies and the thyrsos hoist

Of the Bromian revel-rout!

O ye domes! and the measure proceeds

For blood, not such as the cluster bleeds

Of the Dionusian pouring-out!

Break forth, fly, children! fatal this—

Fatal the lay that is piped, I wis!

Ay, for he hunts a children-chase—

Never shall Madness lead her revel  
 And leave no trace in the dwelling-place!  
 Ai ai, because of the evil!  
 Ai, ai, the old man—how I groan  
 For the father, and not the father alone!  
 She who was nurse of his children,—small  
 Her gain that they ever were born at all!

See! See!

A whirlwind shakes hither and thither  
 The house—the roof falls in together!  
 Ha, ha, what dost thou, son of Zeus?  
 A trouble of Tartaros broke loose,  
 Such as once Pallas on the Titan thundered,  
 Thou sendest on thy domes, roof-shattered and  
 wall-sundered!

MESSENGER

O bodies white with age!—

CHOROS

What cry, to me—  
*What*, dost thou call with?

MESSENGER

There 's a curse indoors.

CHOROS

I shall not bring a prophet: you suffice.

MESSENGER

Dead are the children.

CHOROS

Ai ai!

MESSENGER

Groan! for, groans  
 Suit well the subject. Dire the children's death,  
 Dire too the parent's hands that dealt the fate.  
 No one could tell worse woe than we have borne.

## CHOROS

How dost thou that same curse—curse, cause for groan—  
The father's on the children, make appear?  
Tell in what matter they were hurled from heaven  
Against the house—these evils; and recount  
The children's hapless fate, O Messenger!

## MESSENGER

The victims were before the hearth of Zeus,  
A household-expiation: since the king  
O' the country, Herakles had killed and cast  
From out the dwelling; and a beauteous choir  
Of boys stood by his sire, too, and his wife.  
And now the basket had been carried round  
The altar in a circle, and we used  
The consecrated speech. Alkmené's son,—  
Just as he was about, in his right hand,  
To bear the torch, that he might dip into  
The cleansing-water,—came to a stand-still;  
And, as their father yet delayed, his boys  
Had their eyes on him. But he was himself  
No longer: lost in rollings of the eyes;  
Outthrusting eyes—their very roots—like blood!  
Froth he dropped down his bushy-bearded cheek,  
And said—together with a madman's laugh—  
'Father! why sacrifice, before I slay  
Eurustheus? why have twice the lustral fire,  
And double pains, when 't is permitted me  
To end, with one good hand-sweep, matters here?  
Then,—when I hither bring Eurustheus' head,—  
Then for these just slain, wash hands once for all!  
Now,—cast drink-offerings forth, throw baskets down!  
Who gives me bow and arrows, who my club?  
I go to that Mukenai. One must match  
Crowbars and mattocks, so that—those sunk stones  
The Kuklops squared with picks and plumb-line red—  
I, with my bent steel, may o'ertumble town.'  
Which said, he goes and—with no car to have—  
Affirms he has one! mounts the chariot-board,  
And strikes, as having really goad in hand!  
And two ways laughed the servants—laugh with awe;  
And one said, as each met the other's stare,

'Playing us boys' tricks? or is master mad?'  
But up he climbs, and down along the roof,  
And, dropping into the men's place, maintains  
He's come to Nisos city, when he's come  
Only inside his own house! then reclines  
On floor, for couch, and, as arrived indeed,  
Makes himself supper; goes through some brief stay  
Then says he's traversing the forest-flats  
Of Isthmos; thereupon lays body bare  
Of bucklings, and begins a contest with  
—No one! and is proclaimed the conqueror—  
He by himself—having called out to hear  
—Nobody! Then, if you will take his word,  
Blaring against Eurustheus horribly,  
He's at Mukenai. But his father laid  
Hold of the strong hand and addressed him thus:  
'O son, what ails thee? Of what sort is this  
Extravagance? Has not some murder-craze,  
Bred of those corpses thou didst just despatch,  
Danced thee drunk?' But he,—taking him to crouch,  
Eurustheus' sire, that apprehensive touched  
His hand, a suppliant,—pushes him aside,  
Gets ready quiver, and bends bow against  
His children—thinking them Eurustheus' boys  
He means to slay. They, horrified with fear,  
Rushed here and there,—this child, into the robes  
O' the wretched mother—this, beneath the shade  
O' the column,—and this other, like a bird,  
Cowered at the altar-foot. The mother shrieks  
'Parent—what dost thou?—kill thy children?' So  
Shriek the old sire and crowd of servitors.  
But he, outwinding him, as round about  
The column ran the boy,—a horrid whirl  
O' the lathe his foot described!—stands opposite,  
Strikes through the liver; and supine the boy  
Bedews the stone shafts, breathing out his life.  
But 'Victory!' he shouted—boasted thus:  
'Well, this one nestling of Eurustheus—dead—  
Falls by me, pays back the paternal hate!'  
Then bends bow on another who was crouched  
At base of altar—overlooked, he thought—  
And now prevents him, falls at father's knee,  
Throwing up hand to beard and cheek above.



'O dearest!' cries he; 'father, kill me not!  
Yours I am—your boy: not Eurustheus' boy  
You kill now!' But he, rolling the wild eye  
Of Gorgon,—as the boy stood all too close  
For deadly bowshot,—mimicry of smith  
Who batters red-hot iron,—hand o'er head .  
Heaving his club, on the boy's yellow hair  
Hurls it and breaks the bone. This second caught,—  
He goes, would slay the third, one sacrifice  
He and the couple; but, beforehand here,  
The miserable mother catches up,  
Carries him inside house and bars the gate.  
Then he, as he were at those Kuklops' work,  
Digs at, heaves doors up, wrenches doorposts out,  
Lays wife and child low with the selfsame shaft.  
And this done, at the old man's death he drives;  
But there came, as it seemed to us who saw,  
A statue—Pallas with the crested head,  
Swinging her spear—and threw a stone which smote  
Herakles' breast and stayed his slaughter-rage,  
And sent him safe to sleep. He falls to ground—  
Striking against the column with his back—  
Column which, with the falling of the roof,  
Broken in two, lay by the altar-base.  
And we, foot-free now from our several flights,  
Along with the old man, we fastened bonds  
Of rope-noose to the column, so that he,  
Ceasing from sleep, might not go adding deeds  
To deeds done. And he sleeps a sleep, poor wretch,  
No gift of any god! since he has slain  
Children and wife. For me, I do not know  
What mortal has more misery to bear.

## CHOROS

A murder there was which Argolis  
Holds in remembrance, Hellas through,  
As, at that time, best and famousest:  
Of those, the daughters of Danaos slew.  
A murder indeed was that! but this  
Outstrips it, straight to the goal has pressed  
I am able to speak of a murder done  
To the hapless Zeus-born offspring, too—

Prokné's son, who had but one—  
 Or a sacrifice to the Muses, say  
 Rather, who Itus sing alway,  
 Her single child. But thou, the sire  
 Of children three—O thou consuming fire!—  
 In one outrageous fate hast made them all expire.  
 And this outrageous fate—  
 What groan, or wail, or deadmen's dirge,  
 Or choric dance of Haides shall I urge  
 The Muse to celebrate?

Woe! woe! behold!  
 The portalled palace lies unrolled,  
 This way and that way, each prodigious fold!  
 Alas for me! these children, see,  
 Stretched, hapless group, before their father—he  
 The all-unhappy, who lies sleeping out  
 The murder of his sons, a dreadful sleep!  
 And bonds, see, all about,—  
 Rope-tangle, ties and tether,—these  
 Tightenings around the body of Herakles  
 To the stone columns of the house made fast!

But—like a bird that grieves  
 For callow nestlings some rude hand bereaves—  
 See, here, a bitter journey overpast,  
 The old man—all too late—is here at last!

#### AMPHITRUON

Silently, silently, aged Kadmeians!  
 Will ye not suffer my son, diffused  
 Yonder, to slide from his sorrows in sleep?

#### CHOROS

And thee, old man, do I, groaning, weep,  
 And the children too, and the head there—used  
 Of old to the wreaths and paians!

#### AMPHITRUON

Farther away! Nor beat the breast,  
 Nor wail aloud, nor rouse from rest  
 The slumberer—asleep, so best!

CHOROS

Ah me—what a slaughter!

AMPHITRUON

Refrain—refrain!

Ye will prove my perdition.

CHOROS

Unlike water,  
Bloodshed rises from earth again.

AMPHITRUON

Do I bid you bate your breath, in vain—  
Ye elders? Lament in a softer strain!  
Lest he rouse himself, burst every chain,  
And bury the city in ravage—bray  
Father and house to dust away!

CHOROS

I cannot forbear—I cannot forbear!

AMPHITRUON

Hush! I will learn his breathings: there!  
I will lay my ears close.

CHOROS

What, he sleeps?

AMPHITRUON

Ay,—sleeps! A horror of slumber keeps  
The man who has piled  
On wife and child  
Death and death, as he shot them down  
With clang o' the bow.

CHOROS

Wail—

AMPHITRUON

Even so!

CHOROS

—The fate of the children—

AMPHITRUON

Triple woe

CHOROS

—Old man, the fate of thy son!

AMPHITRUON

Hush, hush! Have done!  
He is turning about!  
He is breaking out!  
Away! I steal  
And my body conceal,  
Before he arouse,  
In the depths of the house.

CHOROS

Courage! The Night  
Maintains her right  
On the lids of thy son there, sealed from sight!

AMPHITRUON

See, see! To leave the light  
And, wretch that I am, bear one last ill.  
I do not avoid; but if he kill  
Me his own father, and devise  
Beyond the present miseries  
A misery more ghastly still—  
And to haunt him, over and above  
Those here who, as they used to love  
Now hate him, what if he have with these  
My murder, the worst of Erinues?

CHOROS

Then was the time to die, for thee,  
When ready to wreak in the full degree  
Vengeance on those  
Thy consort's foes

Who murdered her brothers! glad, life's close,  
With the Taphioi down,  
And sacked their town  
Clustered about with a wash of sea!

## AMPHITRUON

To flight—to flight!  
Away from the house, troop off, old men!  
Save yourselves out of the maniac's sight!  
He is rousing himself right up: and then,  
Murder on murder heaping anew,  
He will revel in blood your city through!

## CHOROS

O Zeus, why hast, with such unmeasured hate,  
Hated thy son, whelmed in this sea of woes?

## HERAKLES

Ha,—  
In breath indeed I am—see things I ought—  
Æther, and earth, and these the sunbeam-shafts!  
But then—some billow and strange whirl of sense  
I have fallen into! and breathings hot I breathe—  
Smoked upwards, not the steady work from lungs.  
See now! Why bound,—at moorings like a ship,—  
About my young breast and young arm, to this  
Stone piece of carved work broke in half, do I  
Sit, have my rest in corpses' neighbourhood?  
Strewn on the ground are winged darts, and bow  
Which played my brother shieldman, held in hand,—  
Guarded my side, and got my guardianship!  
I cannot have gone back to Haides—twice  
Begun Eurustheus' race I ended thence?  
But I nor see the Sisupheian stone,  
Nor Plouton, nor Demeter's sceptred maid!  
I am struck witless sure! Where can I be?  
Ho there! what friend of mine is near or far—  
Someone to cure me of bewilderment?  
For nought familiar do I recognize.

## AMPHITRUON

Old friends, shall I go close to these my woes?

CHOROS

Ay, and let me too,—nor desert your ills!

HERAKLES

Father, why weepest thou, and buriest up  
Thine eyes, aloof so from thy much-loved son?

AMPHITRUON

O child!—for, faring badly, mine thou art!

HERAKLES

Do I fare somehow ill, that tears should flow?

AMPHITRUON

Ill,—would cause any god who bore, to groan!

HERAKLES

That 's boasting, truly! still, you state no hap.

AMPHITRUON

For, thyself seest—if in thy wits again.

HERAKLES

Heyday! How riddlingly that hint returns!

AMPHITRUON

Well, I am trying—art thou sane and sound!

HERAKLES

Say if thou lay'st aught strange to my life's charge!

AMPHITRUON

If thou no more art Haides-drunk,—I tell!

HERAKLES

I bring to mind no drunkenness of soul.

AMPHITRUON

Shall I unbind my son, old men, or what?



HERAKLES

And who was binder, tell!—not *that*, my deed!

AMPHITRUON

Mind that much of misfortune—pass the rest!

HERAKLES

Enough! from silence, I nor learn nor wish.

AMPHITRUON

O Zeus, dost witness here throned Heré's work?

HERAKLES

But have I had to bear aught hostile thence?

AMPHITRUON

Let be the goddess—bury thine own guilt!

HERAKLES

Undone! What is the sorrow thou wilt say?

AMPHITRUON

Look! See the ruins of thy children here!

HERAKLES

Ah me! What sight do wretched I behold?

AMPHITRUON

Unfair fight, son, this fight thou fastenedst  
On thine own children!

HERAKLES

What fight? Who slew these?

AMPHITRUON

Thou and thy bow, and who of gods was cause.

HERAKLES

How say'st? What did I? Ill-announcing sire!

AMPHITRUON

—Go mad! Thou askest a sad clearing up.

HERAKLES

And am I also murderer of my wife?

AMPHITRUON

All the work here was just one hand's work—thine!

HERAKLES

Ai ai—for groans encompass me—a cloud!

AMPHITRUON

For these deeds' sake do I begroan thy fate.

HERAKLES

Did I break up my house or dance it down?

AMPHITRUON

I know just one thing—all 's a woe with thee.

HERAKLES

But where did the craze catch me? where destroy?

AMPHITRUON

When thou didst cleanse hands at the altar-flame.

HERAKLES

Ah me! why is it then I save my life—  
Proved murderer of my dearest ones, my boys?  
Shall not I rush to the rock-level's leap,  
Or, darting sword through breast and all, become  
My children's blood-avenger? or, this flesh  
Burning away with fire, so thrust away  
The infamy, which waits me there, from life?

Ah but,—a hindrance to my purposed death,  
Theseus arrives, my friend and kinsman, here!  
Eyes will be on me! my child-murder-plague

In evidence before friends loved so much!  
O me, what shall I do? Where, taking wing  
Or gliding underground, shall I seek out  
A solitariness from misery?  
I will pull night upon my muffled head!  
Let this wretch here content him with his curse  
Of blood: I would pollute no innocents.

## THESEUS

I come,—with others who await beside  
Asopos' stream, the armed Athenian youth,—  
Bring thy son, old man, spear's fight-fellowship!  
For a bruit reached the Erechtheidai's town  
That, having seized the sceptre of this realm,  
Lukos prepares you battle-violence.  
So, paying good back,—Herakles began,  
Saving me down there,—I have come, old man,  
If aught, of my hand or my friends', you want.  
What's here? Why all these corpses on the ground?  
Am I perhaps behindhand—come too late  
For newer ill? Who killed these children now?  
Whose wife was she, this woman I behold?  
Boys, at least, take no stand in reach of spear!  
Some other woe than war, I chance upon.

## AMPHITRUON

O thou, who sway'st the olive-bearing height!—

## THESEUS

Why hail'st thou me with woeful prelude thus?

## AMPHITRUON

Dire sufferings have we suffered from the gods.

## THESEUS

These boys,—who are they thou art weeping o'er?

## AMPHITRUON

He gave them birth, indeed, my hapless son!  
Begot, but killed them—dared their bloody death.

THESEUS

Speak no such horror!

AMPHITRUON

Would I might obey!

THESEUS

O teller of dread tidings!

AMPHITRUON

Lost are we—  
Lost—flown away from life!

THESEUS

What sayest thou?  
What did he?

AMPHITRUON

Erring through a frenzy-fit,  
He did all, with the arrows dipt in dye  
Of hundred-headed Hudra.

THESEUS

Heré's strife!  
But who is this among the dead, old man?

AMPHITRUON

Mine, mine, this progeny—the labour-plagued,  
Who went with gods once to Phlegruia's plain,  
And in the giant-slaying war bore shield.

THESEUS

Woe—woe! What man was born mischanceful thus!

AMPHITRUON

Thou couldst not know another mortal man  
Toil-weary, more outworn by wanderings.

THESEUS

And why i' the peploi hides he his sad head?

## AMPHITRUON

Not daring meet thine eye, thy friendliness  
And kinship,—nor that children's-blood about.

## THESEUS

But *I* come to who shared my woe with me!  
Uncover him!

## AMPHITRUON

O child, put from thine eyes  
The peplos, throw it off, show face to sun!  
Woe's weight well matched contends with tears in thee.  
I supplicate thee, falling at thy cheek  
And knee and hand, and shedding this old tear!  
O son, remit the savage lion's mood,  
Since to a bloody, an unholy race  
Art thou led forth, if thou be resolute  
To go on adding ill to ill, my child!

## THESEUS

Let me speak! Thee, who sittest—seated woe—  
I call upon to show thy friends thine eye!  
For there 's no darkness has a cloud so black  
May hide thy misery thus absolute.  
Why, waving hand, dost sign me—murder 's done?  
Lest a pollution strike me, from thy speech?  
Nought care I to—with thee, at least—fare ill:  
For I had joy once! *Then*,—soul rises to,—  
When thou didst save me from the dead to light!  
Friends' gratitude that tastes old age, I loathe,  
And him who likes to share when things look fine,  
But, sail along with friends in trouble—no!  
Arise, uncover thine unhappy head!  
Look on us! Every man of the right race  
Bears what, at least, the gods inflict, nor shrinks.

## HERAKLES

Theseus, hast seen this match—my boys with me?

## THESEUS

I heard of, now I see the ills thou sign'st.

HERAKLES

Why then hast thou displayed my head to sun?

THESEUS

Why? mortals bring no plague on ought divine.

HERAKLES

Fly, O unhappy, this my impious plague!

THESEUS

No plague of vengeance flits to friends from friends.

HERAKLES

I praise thee. But I helped thee,—that is truth.

THESEUS

And I, advantaged then, now pity thee.

HERAKLES

—The pitiable,—my children's murderer!

THESEUS

I mourn for thy sake, in this altered lot.

HERAKLES

Hast thou found others in still greater woe?

THESEUS

Thou, from earth, touchest heaven, one huge distress!

HERAKLES

Accordingly, I am prepared to die.

THESEUS

Think'st thou thy threats at all import the gods?

HERAKLES

Gods please themselves: to gods I give their like.



THESEUS

Shut thy mouth, lest big words bring bigger woe!

HERAKLES

I am full fraught with ills—no stowing more!

THESEUS

Thou wilt do—what, then? Whither moody borne?

HERAKLES

Dying, I go below earth whence I came.

THESEUS

Thou hast used words of—what man turns up first!

HERAKLES

While thou, being outside sorrow, schoolest me.

THESEUS

The much-enduring Herakles talks thus?—

HERAKLES

Not the so much-enduring: measure's past.

THESEUS

—Mainstay to mortals, and their mighty friend?

HERAKLES

They nowise profit me: but Heré rules.

THESEUS

Hellas forbids thou shouldst ineptly die.

HERAKLES

But hear, then, how I strive by arguments  
Against thy teachings! I will ope thee out  
My life—past, present—as unliveable.  
First, I was born of this man, who had slain  
His mother's aged sire, and, sullied so,

Married Alkmené, she who gave me birth.  
Now, when the basis of a family  
Is not laid right, what follows needs must fall;  
And Zeus, whoever Zeus is, formed me foe  
To Heré (take not thou offence, old man!  
Since father, in Zeus' stead, account I thee),  
And, while I was at suck yet, frightful snakes  
She introduced among my swaddling-clothes,—  
That bedfellow of Zeus!—to end me so.  
But when I gained the youthful garb of flesh,  
The labours I endured—what need to tell?  
What lions ever, or three-bodied brutes,  
Tuphons or giants, or the four-legg'd swarms  
Of Kentaur-battle, did not I end out?  
And that hound, headed all about with heads  
Which cropped up twice, the Hudra, having slain—  
I both went through a myriad other toils  
In full drove, and arrived among the dead  
To convoy, as Eurustheus bade, to light  
Haides' three-headed dog and doorkeeper.  
But then I,—wretch,—dared this last labour—see!  
Slew my sons, keystone-coped my house with ills.  
To such a strait I come! nor my dear Thebes  
Dare I inhabit: and, suppose I stay?  
Into what fane or festival of friends  
Am I to go? My curse scarce courts accost!  
Shall I seek Argos? How, if fled from home?  
But say—I hurry to some other town!  
And there they eye me, as notorious now,—  
Kept by sharp tongue-taunts under lock and key—  
'Is not this he, Zeus' son, who murdered once  
Children and wife? Let him go rot elsewhere!'  
To any man renowned as happy once,  
Reverses are a grave thing; but to whom  
Evil is old acquaintance there's no hurt  
To speak of, he and misery are twins.  
To this degree of woe I think to come:  
For earth will utter voice forbidding me  
To touch the ground, and sea—to pierce the wave,  
The river-springs—to drink, and I shall play  
Ixion's part quite out, the chained and wheeled!  
And best of all will be, if so I 'scape  
Sight from one man of those Hellenes,—once

I lived among, felicitous and rich!  
Why ought I then to live? What gain accrues  
From good-for-nothing, wicked life I lead?  
In fine, let Zeus' brave consort dance and sing,  
Stamp foot, the Olumpian Zeus' own sandal-trick!  
What she has willed, that brings her will to pass—  
The foremost man of Hellas pedestalled,  
Up, over, and down whirling! Who would pray  
To such a goddess?—that, begrudging Zeus  
Because he loved a woman, ruins me—  
Lover of Hellas, faultless of the wrong!

## THESEUS

This strife is from no other of the gods  
Than Zeus' wife; rightly apprehend, as well,  
Why, to no death—thou meditatest now—  
I would persuade thee, but to bear thy woes!  
None, none of mortals boasts a fate unmixed,  
Nor gods—if poets' teaching be not false.  
Have not they joined in wedlock against law  
With one another? not, for sake of rule,  
Branded their sires in bondage? Yet they house,  
All the same, in Olumpos, carry heads  
High there, notorious sinners though they be!  
What wilt thou say, then, if thou, mortal-born,  
Bearest outrageously fate gods endure?  
Leave Thebes, now, pay obedience to the law  
And follow me to Pallas' citadel!  
There, when thy hands are purified from stain,  
House will I give thee, and goods shared alike.  
What gifts I hold too from the citizens  
For saving twice seven children, when I slew  
The Knosian bull, these also give I thee.  
And everywhere about the land are plots  
Apportioned me: these, named, by thine own name,  
Shall be henceforward styled by all men—thine,  
Thy life long; but at death, when Haides-bound,  
All Athens shall uphold the honoured one  
With sacrifices, and huge marble heaps:  
For that 's a fair crown our Hellenes grant  
Their people—glory, should they help the brave!  
And I repay thee back this grace for thine

That saved me, now that thou art lorn of friends—  
Since, when the gods give honour, friends may flit:  
For, a god's help suffices, if he please.

## HERAKLES

Ah me, these words are foreign to my woes!  
I neither fancy gods love lawless beds,  
Nor, that with chains they bind each other's hands,  
Have I judged worthy faith, at any time;  
Nor shall I be persuaded—one is born  
His fellows' master! since God stands in need—  
If he is really God—of nought at all.  
These are the poets' pitiful conceits!  
But this it was I pondered, though woe-whelmed—  
'Take heed lest thou be taxed with cowardice  
Somehow in leaving thus the light of day!'  
For whoso cannot make a stand against  
These same misfortunes, neither could withstand  
A mere man's dart, oppose death, strength to strength.  
Therefore unto thy city I will go  
And have the grace of thy ten thousand gifts.  
There! I have tasted of ten thousand toils  
As truly—never waived a single one,  
Nor let these runnings drop from out my eyes:  
Nor ever thought it would have come to this—  
That I from out my eyes do drop tears. Well!  
At present, as it seems, one bows to fate.  
So be it! Old man, thou seest my exile—  
Seest, too, me—my children's murderer!  
These give thou to the tomb, and deck the dead,  
Doing them honour with thy tears—since me  
Law does not sanction. Propping on her breast,  
And giving them into their mother's arms,  
—Re-institute the sad community  
Which I, unhappy, brought to nothingness—  
Not by my will! And, when earth hides the dead,  
Live in this city!—sad, but, all the same,  
Force thy soul to bear woe along with me!  
O children, who begat and gave you birth—  
Your father—has destroyed you! nought you gain  
By those fair deeds of mine I laid you up,  
As by main-force I laboured glory out

To give you,—that fine gift of fatherhood!  
 And thee, too, O my poor one, I destroyed,  
 Not rendering like for like, as when thou kept'st  
 My marriage-bed inviolate,—those long  
 Household-seclusions draining to the dregs  
 Inside my house! O me, my wife, my boys—  
 And—O myself, how, miserably moved,  
 Am I disyoked now from both boys and wife!  
 O bitter those delights of kisses now—  
 And bitter these my weapons' fellowship!  
 For I am doubtful whether shall I keep  
 Or cast away these arrows which will clang  
 Ever such words out, as they knock my side—  
 'Us—thou didst murder wife and children with!  
 Us—child-destroyers—still thou keepest thine!'—  
 Ha, shall I bear them in my arms, then? What  
 Say for excuse? Yet, naked of my darts  
 Wherewith I did my bravest, Hellas through,  
 Throwing myself beneath foot to my foes,  
 Shall I die basely? No! relinquishment  
 Of these must never be,—companions once,  
 We sorrowfully must observe the pact.  
 In just one thing, co-operate with me  
 Thy sad friend, Theseus! Go along with him  
 To Argos, and in concert get arranged  
 The price my due for bringing there the Hound!  
 O land of Kadmos, Theban people all,  
 Shear off your locks, lament one wide lament,  
 Go to my children's grave and, in one strain,  
 Lament the whole of us—my dead and me—  
 Since all together are fordome and lost,  
 Smitten by Heré's single stroke of fate!

## THESEUS

Rise up now from thy dead ones! Tears enough,  
 Poor friend!

## HERAKLES

I cannot: for my limbs are fixed.

## THESEUS

Ay: even these strong men fate overthrows.

HERAKLES

Woe!

Here might I grow a stone, nor mind woes more!

THESEUS

Cease! Give thy hand to friendly helpmate now!

HERAKLES

Nay, but I wipe off blood upon thy robes.

THESEUS

Squeeze out and spare no drop! I take it all!

HERAKLES

Of sins bereaved, I have thee like my son.

THESEUS

Give to my neck thy hand! 't is I will lead.

HERAKLES

Yoke-fellows friendly—one heart-broken, though!  
O father, such a man we need for friend!

AMPHITRUON

Certes the land that bred him boasts good sons.

HERAKLES

Turn me round, Theseus—to behold my boys!

THESEUS

What? will the having such a love-charm soothe?

HERAKLES

I want it; and to press my father's breast.

AMPHITRUON

See here, O son! for, what I love thou seek'st.



THESEUS

Strange! Of thy labours no more memory?

HERAKLES

All those were less than these, those ills I bore.

THESEUS

Who sees thee grow a woman,—will not praise.

HERAKLES

I live low to thee? Not so once, I think.

THESEUS

Too low by far! 'Famed Herakles'—where 's he?

HERAKLES

Down amid evils, of what kind wast *thou*?

THESEUS

As far as courage—least of all mankind!

HERAKLES

How say'st, then, *I* in evils shrink to nought?

THESEUS

Forward!

HERAKLES

Farewell, old father!

AMPHITRUON

Thou too, son!

HERAKLES

Bury the boys as I enjoined!

AMPHITRUON

And *me*—

Who will be found to bury now, my child?

HERAKLES

Myself.

AMPHITRUON

When, coming?

HERAKLES

When thy task is done.

AMPHITRUON

How?

HERAKLES

I will have thee carried forth from Thebes  
To Athens. But bear in the children, earth  
Is burthened by! Myself,—who with these shames  
Have cast away my house,—a ruined hulk,  
I follow—trailed by Theseus—on my way;  
And whoso rather would have wealth and strength  
Than good friends, reasons foolishly therein.

CHOROS

And we depart, with sorrow at heart,  
Sobs that increase with tears that start;  
The greatest of all our friends of yore  
We have lost for evermore!

When the long silence ended,—‘Our best friend—  
Lost, our best friend!’ he muttered musingly,  
Then, ‘Lachares the sculptor’ (half aloud)  
‘Sinned he or sinned he not? “Outrageous sin!”  
Shuddered our elders, “Pallas should be clothed:  
He carved her naked.” “But more beautiful!”  
Answers this generation: “Wisdom formed  
For love not fear!” And there the statue stands,  
Entraps the eye severer art repels.  
Moreover, Pallas wields the thunderbolt  
Yet has not struck the artist all this while  
Pheidias and Aischulos? Euripides

And Lachares? But youth will have its way.  
The ripe man ought to be as old as young—  
As young as old. I too have youth at need.  
Much may be said for stripping wisdom bare.

'And who's "our best friend"? You play kottabos;  
Here's the last mode of playing. Take a sphere  
With orifices at due interval,  
Through topmost one of which, a throw adroit  
Sends wine from cup, clean passage, from outside  
To where, in hollow midst, a manikin  
Suspended ever bobs with head erect  
Right underneath whatever hole's a-top  
When you set orb a-rolling: plumb, he gets  
Ever this benediction of the splash.  
An other-fashioned orb presents him fixed:  
Of all the outlets, he fronts only one,  
And only when that one,—and rare the chance,—  
Comes uppermost, does he turn upward too:  
He can't turn all sides with the turning orb.  
Inside this sphere of life,—all objects, sense  
And soul perceive,—Euripides hangs fixed,  
Gets knowledge through the single aperture  
Of High and Right: with visage fronting these  
He waits the wine thence ere he operate,  
Work in the world and write a tragedy.  
When that hole happens to revolve to point,  
In drops the knowledge, waiting meets reward.  
But, duly in rotation, Low and Wrong—  
When these enjoy the moment's altitude,  
His heels are found just where his head should be!  
No knowledge that way! I am movable,—  
To slightest shift of orb make prompt response,  
Face Low and Wrong and Weak and all the rest,  
And still drink knowledge, wine-drenched every turn,—  
Equally favoured by their opposites.  
Little and Bad exist, are natural:  
Then let me know them, and be twice as great  
As he who only knows one phase of life!  
So doubly shall I prove "best friend of man,"  
If I report the whole truth—Vice, perceived  
While he shut eyes to all but Virtue there.  
Man's made of both: and both must be of use  
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To somebody: if not to him, to me.  
 While, as to your imaginary Third  
 Who, stationed (by mechanics past my guess)  
 So as to take in every side at once,  
 And not successively,—may reconcile  
 The High and Low in tragi-comic verse,—  
 He shall be hailed superior to us both  
 When born—in the Tin-islands! Meantime, here  
 In bright Athenai, I contest the claim,  
 Call myself Iostephanos' "best friend,"  
 Who took my own course, worked as I descried  
 Ordainment, stuck to my first faculty.

'For listen! There's no failure breaks the heart,  
 Whate'er be man's endeavour in this world,  
 Like the rash poet's when he—nowise fails  
 By poetizing badly,—Zeus or makes  
 Or mars a man, so—at it, merrily!  
 But when,—made man,—much like myself,—equipt  
 For such and such achievement,—rash he turns  
 Out of the straight path, bent on snatch of feat  
 From—who's the appointed fellow born thereto,—  
 Crows take him!—in your Kassiterides?  
 Half-doing his work, leaving mine untouched,  
 That were the failure. Here I stand, heart-whole,  
 No Thamuris!

'Well thought of, Thamuris!  
 Has zeal, pray, for "best friend" Euripides  
 Allowed you to observe the honour done  
 His elder rival, in our Poikilé?  
 You don't know? Once and only once, trod stage,  
 Sang and touched lyre in person, in his youth,  
 Our Sophokles,—youth, beauty, dedicate  
 To Thamuris who named the tragedy.  
 The voice of him was weak; face, limbs and lyre,  
 These were worth saving: Thamuris stands yet  
 Perfect as painting helps in such a case,  
 At least you know the story, for "best friend"  
 Enriched his "Rhesos" from the Blind Bard's store;  
 So haste and see the work, and lay to heart  
 What it was struck me when I eyed the piece!  
 Here stands a poet punished for rash strife

With Powers above his power, who see with sight  
Beyond his vision, sing accordingly  
A song, which he must needs dare emulate.  
Poet, remain the man nor ape the Muse!

'But—lend me the psalterion! Nay, for once—  
Once let my hand fall where the other's lay!  
I see it, just as I were Sophokles,  
That sunrise and combustion of the east!'

And then he sang—are these unlike the words?

Thamuris marching,—lyre and song of Thrace—  
(Perpend the first, the worst of woes that were  
Allotted lyre and song, ye poet-race!)

Thamuris from Oichalia, feasted there  
By kingly Eurutos of late, now bound  
For Dorion at the uprise broad and bare

Of Mount Pangaios (ore with earth enwound  
Glittered beneath his footstep)—marching gay  
And glad, Thessalia through, came, robed and crowned,

From triumph on to triumph, mid a ray  
Of early morn,—came, saw and knew the spot  
Assigned him for his worst of woes, that day.

Balura—happier while its name was not—  
Met him, but nowise menaced; slipt aside,  
Obsequious river to pursue its lot

Of solacing the valley—say, some wide  
Thick busy human cluster, house and home,  
Embanked for peace, or thrift that thanks the tide.

Thamuris, marching, laughed 'Each flake of foam'  
(As sparkingly the ripple raced him by)  
'Mocks slower clouds adrift in the blue dome!'

For Autumn was the season; red the sky  
Held morn's conclusive signet of the sun  
To break the mists up, bid them blaze and die.

Morn had the mastery as, one by one  
All pomps produced themselves along the tract  
From earth's far ending to near heaven begun.

Was there a ravaged tree? it laughed compact  
With gold, a leaf-ball crisp, high brandished now,  
Tempting to onset frost which late attacked.

Was there a wizened shrub, a starveling bough,  
A fleecy thistle filched from by the wind,  
A weed, Pan's trampling hoof would disallow?

Each, with a glory and a rapture twined  
About it, joined the rush of air and light  
And force: the world was of one joyous mind.

Say not the birds flew! they forebore their right—  
Swam, revelling onward in the roll of things.  
Say not the beasts' mirth bounded! that was flight—

How could the creatures leap, no lift of wings?  
Such earth's community of purpose, such  
The ease of earth's fulfilled imaginings,—

So did the near and far appear to touch  
I' the moment's transport,—that an interchange  
Of function, far with near, seemed scarce too much;

And had the rooted plant aspired to range  
With the snake's license, while the insect yearned  
To glow fixed as the flower, it were not strange—

No more than if the fluttery tree-top turned  
To actual music, sang itself aloft;  
Or if the wind, impassioned chantress, earned

The right to soar embodied in some soft  
Fine form all fit for cloud-companionship,  
And, blissful, once touched beauty chased so oft.

Thamuris, marching, let no fancy slip  
Born of the fiery transport; lyre and song  
Were his, to smite with hand and launch from lip—



Peerless recorded, since the list grew long  
Of poets (saith Homeros) free to stand  
Pedestalled mid the Muses' temple-throng.

A statued service, laurelled, lyre in hand,  
(Ay, for we see them)—Thamuris of Thrace  
Predominating foremost of the band.

Therefore the morn-ray that enriched his face,  
If it gave lambent chill, took flame again  
From flush of pride; he saw, he knew the place.

What wind arrived with all the rhythms from plain,  
Hill, dale, and that rough wildwood interspersed?  
Compounding these to one consummate strain,

It reached him, music; but his own outburst  
Of victory concluded the account,  
And that grew song which was mere music erst.

'Be my Parnassos, thou Pangaian mount!  
And turn thee, river, nameless hitherto!  
Famed shalt thou vie with famed Pieria's fount!

'Here I await the end of this ado:  
Which wins—Earth's poet or the Heavenly Muse.' . . .

But song broke up in laughter. 'Tell the rest  
Who may! I have not spurned the common life,  
Nor vaunted mine a lyre to match the Muse  
Who sings for gods, not men! Accordingly,  
I shall not decorate her vestibule—  
Mute marble, blind the eyes and quenched the brain,  
Loose in the hand a bright, a broken lyre!  
—Not Thamuris but Aristophanes!

'There! I have sung content back to myself,  
And started subject for a play beside.  
My next performance shall content you both.  
Did "Prelude-Battle" maul "best friend" too much?  
Then "Main-Fight" be my next song, fairness' self!  
Its subject—Contest for the Tragic Crown.  
Ay, you shall hear none else but Aischulos

Lay down the law of Tragedy, and prove  
 "Best friend" a stray-away,—no praise denied  
 His manifold deservings, never fear—  
 Nor word more of the old fun! Death defends.  
 Sound admonition has its due effect.  
 Oh, you have uttered weighty words, believe!  
 Such as shall bear abundant fruit, next year,  
 In judgment, regular, legitimate.  
 Let Bacchos' self preside in person! Ay—  
 For there's a buzz about those "Bacchanals"  
 Rumour attributes to your great and dead  
 For final effort: just the prodigy  
 Great dead men leave, to lay survivors low!  
 —Until we make acquaintance with our fate  
 And find, fate's worst done, we, the same, survive  
 Perchance to honour more the patron-god,  
 Fitlier inaugurate a festal year.  
 Now that the cloud has broken, sky laughs blue,  
 Earth blossoms youthfully. Athenai breathes.  
 After a twenty-six years' wintry blank.  
 Struck from her life,—war-madness, one long swoon,  
 She wakes up: Arginousai bids good cheer.  
 We have disposed of Kallikratidas;  
 Once more will Sparté sue for terms,—who knows?  
 Cede Dekeleia, as the rumour runs:  
 Terms which Athenai, of right mind again,  
 Accepts—she can no other. Peace declared,  
 Have my long labours borne their fruit or no?  
 Grinned coarse buffoonery so oft in vain?  
 Enough—it simply saved you. Saved ones, praise  
 Theoria's beauty and Opora's breadth!  
 Nor, when Peace realizes promised bliss,  
 Forget the Bald Bard, Envy! but go burst  
*As the cup goes round and the cates abound,*  
*Collops of hare with roast spinks rare!*  
 Confess my pipings, dancings, posings served  
 A purpose: guttlings, guzzlings, had their use!  
 Say whether light Muse, Rosy-finger-tips,  
 Or "best friend's" heavy-hand, Melpomené,  
 Touched lyre to purpose, played Amphion's part,  
 And built Athenai to the skies once more!  
 Farewell, brave couple! Next year, welcome me!'

---

No doubt, in what he said that night, sincere!  
 One story he referred to, false or fact,  
 Was not without adaptability.  
 They do say—Lais the Corinthian once  
 Chancing to see Euripides (who paced  
 Composing in a garden, tablet-book  
 In left hand, with appended stulos prompt)  
 'Answer me,' she began, 'O Poet,—this!  
 What didst intend by writing in thy play  
*Go hang, thou filthy doer?*' Struck on heap,  
 Euripides, at the audacious speech—  
 'Well now,' quoth he, 'thyself art just the one  
 I should imagine fit for deeds of filth!'  
 She laughingly retorted his own line  
 'What 's filth,—unless who does it, thinks it so?'

So might he doubtless think. 'Farewell,' said we.  
 And he was gone, lost in the morning-grey  
 Rose-streaked and gold to eastward. Did we dream?  
 Could the poor twelve-hours hold this argument  
 We render durable from fugitive,  
 As duly at each sunset's droop of sail,  
 Delay of oar, submission to sea-might,  
 I still remember, you as duly dint  
 Remembrance, with the punctual rapid style,  
 Into—what calm cold page!

Thus soul escapes  
 From eloquence made captive: thus mere words  
 —Ah, would the lifeless body stay! But no:  
 Change upon change till,—who may recognize  
 What did soul service, in the dusty heap?  
 What energy of Aristophanes  
 Inflames the wreck Balaustion saves to show?  
 Ashes be evidence how fire—with smoke—  
 All night went lamping on! But morn must rise.  
 The poet—I shall say—burned up and, blank  
 Smouldered this ash, now white and cold enough.

Nay, Euthukles! for best, though mine it be,  
 Comes yet. Write on, write ever, wrong no word!

Add, first,—he gone, if jollity went too,  
 Some of the graver mood, which mixed and marred,

Departed likewise. Sight of narrow scope  
 Has this meek consolation: neither ills  
 We dread, nor joys we dare anticipate,  
 Perform to promise. Each soul sows a seed—  
 Euripides and Aristophanes;  
 Seed bears crop, scarce within our little lives;  
 But germinates,—perhaps enough to judge,—  
 Next year?

Whereas, next year brought harvest time!  
 For, next year came, and went not, but is now,  
 Still now, while you and I are bound for Rhodes  
 That's all but reached—and harvest has it brought.  
 Dire as the homicidal dragon-crop.  
 Sophokles had dismissal ere it dawned,  
 Happy as ever; though men mournfully  
 Plausible,—when only soul could triumph now,  
 And Iophon produced his father's play,—  
 Crowned the consummate song where Oidipous  
 Dared the descent mid earthquake-thundering,  
 And hardly Theseus' hands availed to guard  
 Eyes from the horror, as their grove disgorged  
 Its dread ones, while each daughter sank to ground.

Then Aristophanes, on heel of that,  
 Triumphant also, followed with his 'Frogs':  
 Produced at next Lenaia,—three months since,—  
 The promised Main-Fight, loyal, license-free!  
 As if the poet, primed with Thasian juice,  
 (Himself swore—wine that conquers every kind  
 For long abiding in the head) could fix  
 Thenceforward any object in its truth,  
 Through eyeballs bathed by mere Castalian dew,  
 Nor miss the borrowed medium,—vinous drop  
 That colours all to the right crimson pitch  
 When mirth grows mockery, censure takes the tinge  
 Of malice!

All was Aristophanes:  
 There blazed the glory, there shot black the shame.  
 Ay, Bacchos did stand forth, the Tragic God  
 In person! and when duly dragged through mire,—  
 Having lied, filched, played fool, proved coward, flung

The boys their dose of fit indecency,  
 And finally got trounced to heart's content,  
 At his own feast, in his own theatre  
 (—Oh never fear! 'T was consecrated sport,  
 Exact tradition, warranted no whit  
 Offensive to instructed taste,—indeed,  
 Essential to Athenai's liberty,  
 Could the poor stranger understand!) why, then—  
 He was pronounced the rarely-qualified  
 To rate the work, adjust the claims to worth,  
 Of Aischulos (of whom, in other mood,  
 This same appreciative poet pleased  
 To say 'He's all one stiff and gluey piece  
 Of back of swine's neck!')—and of Chatterbox  
 Who, 'twisting words like wool,' usurped his seat  
 In Plouton's realm: 'the arch-rogué, liar, scamp  
 That lives by snatching-up of altar-orts,'  
 —Who failed to recognize Euripides?

Then came a contest for supremacy—  
 Crammed full of genius, wit and run and freak.  
 No spice of undue spite to spoil the dish  
 Of all sorts,—for the Mystics matched the Frogs  
 In poetry, no Seiren sang so sweet!—  
 Till, pressed into the service (how dispense  
 With Phaps-Elaphion and free foot-display?)  
 The Muse of dead Euripides danced frank,  
 Rattled her bits of tile, made all too plain  
 How baby-work like 'Herakles' had birth:  
 Last, Bacchos,—candidly disclaiming brains  
 Able to follow finer arguments,—  
 Confessed himself much moved by three main facts:  
 First,—if you stick a 'Lost his flask of oil'  
 At pause of period, you perplex the sense—  
 Were it the Elegy for Marathon!  
 Next, if you weigh two verses, 'car'—the word,  
 Will outweigh 'club'—the word, in each packed line!  
 And—last, worst fact of all!—in rivalry  
 The younger poet dared to improvise  
 Laudation less distinct of—Triphales?  
 (Nay, that served when ourself abused the youth!)  
 Pheidippides? (nor that's appropriate now!)  
 Then,—Alkibiades, our city's hope,

Since times change and we Comics should change too!  
 These three main facts, well weighed, drew judgment  
 down,  
 Conclusively assigned the wretch his fate—  
 'Fate due' admonished the sage Mystic choir,  
 'To sitting, prate-apace, with Sokrates,  
 Neglecting music and each tragic aid!'  
 —All wound-up by a wish 'We soon may cease  
 From certain griefs, and warfare, worst of them!'  
 —Since, deaf to Comedy's persistent voice,  
 War still raged, still was like to rage. In vain  
 Had Sparté cried once more 'But grant us Peace  
 We give you Dekeleia back!' Too shrewd  
 Was Kleophon to let escape, forsooth,  
 The enemy—at final gasp, besides!

So, Aristophanes obtained the prize,  
 And so Athenai felt she had a friend  
 Far better than her 'best friend,' lost last year;  
 And so, such fame had 'Frogs' that, when came round  
 This present year, those Frogs croaked gay again  
 At the great Feast, Elaphebolion-month.  
 Only—there happened Aigisopotamoi!

And, in the midst of the frog-merriment,  
 Plump o' the sudden, pounces stern King Stork  
 On the light-hearted people of the marsh!  
 Spartan Lusandros swooped precipitate,  
 Ended Athenai, rowed her sacred bay  
 With oars which brought a hundred triremes back  
 Captive!

And first word of the conqueror  
 Was 'Down with those Long Walls, Peiraios' pride!  
 Destroy, yourselves, your bulwarks! Peace needs none!  
 And 'We obey' they shuddered in their dream.

But, at next quick imposure of decree—  
 'No longer democratic government!  
 Henceforth such oligarchy as ourselves  
 Please to appoint you!'—then the horror stung  
 Dreamers awake; they started up a-stare  
 At the half-helot captain and his crew



—Spartans, 'men used to let their hair grow long,  
To fast, be dirty, and just—Socratize'—  
Whose word was 'Trample on Themistokles!'

So, as the way is with much misery,  
The heads swam, hands refused their office, hearts  
Sunk as they stood in stupor. 'Wreck the Walls?  
Ruin Peiraios?—with our Pallas armed  
For interference?—Herakles apprised,  
And Theseus hasting? Lay the Long Walls low?'

Three days they stood, stared,—stonier than their walls.

Whereupon, sleep who might, Lusandros woke:  
Saw the prostration of his enemy,  
Utter and absolute beyond belief,  
Past hope of hatred even. I surmise  
He also probably saw fade in fume  
Certain fears, bred of Bakis-prophecy,  
Nor apprehended any more that gods  
And heroes,—fire, must glow forth, guard the ground  
Where prone, by sober day-dawn, corpse-like lay  
Powerless Athenai, late predominant  
Lady of Hellas,—Sparté's slave-prize now!  
Where should a menace lurk in those slack limbs?  
What was to move his circumspection? Why  
Demolish just Peiraios?

'Stay!' bade he:

'Already promise-breakers? True to type,  
Athenians! past and present and to come—  
The fickle and the false! No stone dislodged,  
No implement applied, yet three days' grace  
Expire! Forbearance is no longer-lived.  
By breaking promise, terms of peace you break—  
Too gently framed for falsehood, fickleness!  
All must be reconsidered—yours the fault!'

Wherewith, he called a council of allies.  
Pent-up resentment used its privilege,—  
Outburst at ending: this the summed result.

'Because we would avenge no transient wrong  
But an eternity of insolence,

Aggression,—folly, no disasters mend,  
 Pride, no reverses teach humility,—  
 Because too plainly were all punishment,  
 Such as comports with less obdurate crime.  
 Evadable by falsehood, fickleness—  
 Experience proves the true Athenian type,—  
 Therefore, 't is need we dig deep down into  
 The root of evil; lop nor bole nor branch.  
 Look up, look round and see, on every side,  
 What nurtured the rank tree to noisome fruit!  
 We who live hutted (so they laugh) not housed,  
 Build barns for temples, prize mud-monuments,  
 Nor show the sneering stranger aught but—men,—  
 Spartans take insult of Athenians just  
 Because they boast Akropolis to mount,  
 And Propylaia to make entry by,  
 Through a mad maze of marble arrogance  
 Such as you see—such as let none see more!  
 Abolish the detested luxury!  
 Leave not one stone upon another, raze  
 Athenai to the rock! Let hill and plain  
 Become a waste, a grassy pasture-ground  
 Where sheep may wander, grazing goats depend  
 From shapeless crags once columns! so at last  
 Shall peace inhabit there, and peace enough.'

Whereon, a shout approved 'Such peace bestow!'

Then did a Man of Phokis rise—O heart!  
 Rise—when no bolt of Zeus disparted sky,  
 No omen-bird from Pallas scared the crew,  
 Rise—when mere human argument could stem  
 No foam-fringe of the passion surging fierce,  
 Baffle no wrath-wave that o'er barrier broke—  
*Who* was the Man of Phokis rose and flung  
 A flower i' the way of that fierce foot's advance,  
 Which—stop for?—nay, had stamped down sword's  
 assault!  
 Could it be *He* stayed Sparté with the snatch  
 'Daughter of Agamemnon, late my liege,  
 Elektra, palaced once, a visitant  
 To thy poor rustic dwelling, now I come?'

Ay, facing fury of revenge, and lust  
Of hate, and malice moaning to appease  
Hunger on prey presumptuous, prostrate now—  
Full in the hideous faces—last resource,  
You flung that choric flower, my Euthukles!

And see, as through some pinhole, should the wind  
Wedgingly pierce but once, in with a rush  
Hurries the whole wild weather, rends to rags  
The weak sail stretched against the outside storm—  
So did the power of that triumphant play  
Pour in, and oversweep the assembled foe!  
Triumphant play, wherein our poet first  
Dared bring the grandeur of the Tragic Two  
Down to the level of our common life,  
Close to the beating of our common heart.  
Elektra? 'T was Athenai, Sparté's ice  
Thawed to, while that sad portraiture appealed—  
Agamemnonian lady, lost by fault  
Of her own kindred, cast from house and home,  
Despoiled of all the brave inheritance,  
Dowered humbly as befits a herdsman's mate,  
Partaker of his cottage, clothed in rags,  
Patient performer of the poorest chares,  
Yet mindful, all the while, of glory past  
When she walked darling of Mukenai, dear  
Beyond Orestes to the King of Men!

So, because Greeks are Greeks, though Sparté's brood,  
And hearts are hearts, though in Lusandros' breast,  
And poetry is power, and Euthukles  
Had faith therein to, full-face, fling the same—  
Sudden, the ice-thaw! The assembled foe,  
Heaving and swaying with strange friendliness,  
Cried 'Reverence Elektra!'—cried 'Abstain  
Like that chaste Herdsman, nor dare violate  
The sancty of such reverse! Let stand  
Athenai!'

Mindful of that story's close,  
Perchance, and how,—when he, the Herdsman chaste,  
Needs apprehend no break of tranquil sleep,—  
All in due time, a stranger, dark, disguised,

Knocks at the door: with searching glance, notes keen,  
 Knows quick, through mean attire and disrespect,  
 The ravaged princess! Ay, right on, the clutch  
 Of guiding retribution has in charge  
 The author of the outrage! While one hand,  
 Elektra's, pulls the door behind, made fast  
 On fate,—the other strains, prepared to push  
 The victim-queen, should she make frightened pause  
 Before that serpentine blood which steals  
 Out of the darkness where, a pace beyond,  
 Above the slain Aigisthos, bides his blow  
 Dreadful Orestes!

Klutaimnestra, wise  
 This time, forbore; Elektra held her own;  
 Saved was Athenai through Euripides,  
 Through Euthukles, through—more than ever—me,  
 Balaustion, me, who, Wild-pomegranate-flower,  
 Felt my fruit triumph, and fade proudly so!

But next day, as ungracious minds are wont,  
 The Spartan, late surprised into a grace,  
 Grew sudden sober at the enormity,  
 And grudged, by daybreak, midnight's easy gift;  
 Splenetically must repay its cost  
 By due increase of rigour, doglike snatch  
 At aught still left dog to concede like man.  
 Rough sea, at flow of tide, may lip, perchance,  
 Smoothly the land-line, reached as for repose—  
 Lie indolent in all unquestioned sway;  
 But ebbing, when needs must, all thwart and loth,  
 Sea claws at sand relinquished strugglingly.  
 So, harsh Lusandros—pinioned to inflict  
 The lesser penalty alone—spoke harsh,  
 As minded to embitter scathe by scorn.

'Athenai's self be saved then, thank the Lyre!  
 If Tragedy withdraws her presence—quick,  
 If Comedy replace her,—what more just?  
 Let Comedy do service, frisk away,  
 Dance off stage these indomitable stones,  
 Long Walls, Peiraian bulwarks! Hew and heave,  
 Pick at, pound into dust each dear defence!

Not to the Kommos—*eleleleleu*

With breast bethumped, as Tragic lyre prefers,  
But Comedy shall sound the flute, and crow  
At kordax-end—the hearty slapping-dance!  
Collect those flute-girls—trash who flattered ear  
With whistlings and fed eye with caper-cuts  
While we Lakonians supped black broth or crunched  
Sea-urchin, conchs and all, unpricked—coarse brutes!  
Command they lead off step, time steady stroke  
To spade and pickaxe, till demolished lie  
Athenai's pride in powder!'

Done that day—

That sixteenth famed day of Munuchion-month!  
The day when Hellas fought at Salamis,  
The very day Euripides was born,  
Those flute-girls—Phaps-Elaphion at their head—  
Did blow their best, did dance their worst, the while  
Sparté pulled down the walls, wrecked wide the works,  
Laid low each merest molehill of defence,  
And so the Power, Athenai, passed away!

We would not see its passing. Ere I knew  
The issue of their counsels,—crouching low  
And shrouded by my peplos,—I conceived,  
Despite the shut eyes, the stopped ears,—by count  
Only of heart-beats, telling the slow time,—  
Athenai's doom was signed and signified  
In that assembly,—ay, but knew there watched  
One who would dare and do, nor bate at all  
The stranger's licensed duty,—speak the word  
Allowed the Man from Phokis! Nought remained  
But urge departure, flee the sights and sounds,  
Hideous exultings, wailings worth contempt,  
And press to other earth, new heaven, by sea  
That somehow ever prompts to 'scape despair.

Help rose to heart's wish; at the harbour-side,  
The old grey mariner did reverence  
To who had saved his ship, still weather-tight  
As when with prow gay-garlanded she praised  
The hospitable port and pushed to sea,  
'Convoy Balaustion back to Rhodes, for sake  
Of her and her Euripides!' laughed he.

Rhodes,—shall it not be there, my Euthukles,  
 Till this brief trouble of a life-time end,  
 That solitude—two make so populous!—  
 For food finds memories of the past suffice,  
 May be, anticipations,—hope so swells,—  
 Of some great future we, familiar once  
 With who so taught, should hail and entertain?  
 He lies now in the little valley, laughed  
 And moaned about by those mysterious streams.  
 Boiling and freezing, like the love and hate  
 Which helped or harmed him through his earthly course  
 They mix in Arethousa by his grave.  
 The warm spring, traveller, dip thine arms into,  
 Brighten thy brow with! Life detests black cold.

I sent the tablets, the psalterion, so  
 Rewarded Sicily; the tyrant there  
 Bestowed them worthily in Phoibos' shrine.  
 A gold-graved writing tells—'I also loved  
 The poet, Free Athenai cheaply prized—  
 King Dionusios,—Archelaos-like!'

And see if young Philemon,—sure one day  
 To do good service and be loved himself,—  
 If he too have not made a votive verse!  
 'Grant, in good sooth, our great dead, all the same,  
 Retain their sense, as certain wise men say,  
 I'd hang myself—to see Euripides!'  
 Hands off, Philemon! nowise hang thyself,  
 But pen the prime plays, labour the right life,  
 And die at good old age as grand men use,—  
 Keeping thee, with that great thought, warm the while,—  
 That he does live, Philemon! Ay, most sure!  
 'He lives!' hark,—waves say, winds sing out the same,  
 And yonder dares the cited ridge of Rhodes  
 Its headlong plunge from sky to sea, disparts  
 North bay from south,—each guarded calm, that guest  
 May enter gladly, blow what wind there will,—  
 Boiled round with breakers, to no other cry!  
 All in one choros,—what the master-word  
 They take up?—hark! 'There are no gods, no gods!  
 Glory to God—who saves Euripides!'



PRINCE HOHENSTIEL-SCHWANGAU,  
SAVIOUR OF SOCIETY.

1871

Υδραν φονεύσας, μυρίων τ' ἄλλων πόνων  
διηγθον ἀγέλας . . .  
τὸ λοίσθιον δέ τόνδ' ἔτλην τάλας πόνον,  
. . . δῶμα θριγκῶσαι κακοῖς.

I slew the Hydra, and from labour pass'd  
To labour—tribes of labours! Till, at last,  
Attempting one more labour, in a trice,  
Alack, with ills I *crowned the edifice*.

You have seen better days, dear? So have I—  
And worse too, for they brought no such bud-mouth  
As yours to lisp 'You wish you knew me!' Well,  
Wise men, 't is said, have sometimes wished the same,  
And wished and had their trouble for their pains.  
Suppose my Œdipus should lurk at last  
Under a pork-pie hat and crinoline,  
And, lateish, pounce on Sphynx in Leicester Square?  
Or likelier, what if Sphynx in wise old age,  
Grown sick of snapping foolish people's heads,  
And jealous for her riddle's proper rede,—  
Jealous that the good trick which served the turn  
Have justice rendered it, nor class one day  
With friend Home's stilts and tongs and medium-ware,—  
What if the once redoubted Sphynx, I say,  
(Because night draws on, and the sands increase,  
And desert-whispers grow a prophecy)  
Tell all to Corinth of her own accord,  
Bright Corinth, not dull Thebes, for Laïs' sake,  
Who finds me hardly grey, and likes my nose,  
And thinks a man of sixty at the prime?  
Good! It shall be! Revealment of myself!  
But listen, for we must co-operate;  
I don't drink tea: permit me the cigar!

First, how to make the matter plain, of course—  
 What was the law by which I lived. Let 's see:  
 Ay, we must take one instant of my life  
 Spent sitting by your side in this neat room:  
 Watch well the way I use it, and don't laugh!  
 Here 's paper on the table, pen and ink:  
 Give me the soiled bit—not the pretty rose!  
 See! having sat an hour, I 'm rested now,  
 Therefore want work: and spy no better work  
 For eye and hand and mind that guides them both,  
 During this instant, than to draw my pen  
 From blot One—thus—up, up to blot Two—thus—  
 Which I at last reach, thus, and here 's my line  
 Five inches long and tolerably straight:  
 Better to draw than leave undrawn, I think,  
 Fitter to do than let alone, I hold,  
 Though better, fitter, by but one degree.  
 Therefore it was that, rather than sit still  
 Simply, my right-hand drew it while my left  
 Pulled smooth and pinched the moustache to a point.

Now I permit your plump lips to unpurse:  
 'So far, one possibly may understand  
 Without recourse to witchcraft!' True, my dear.  
 Thus folks begin with Euclid,—finish, how?  
 Trying to square the circle!—at any rate,  
 Solving abstruser problems than this first  
 'How find the nearest way 'twixt point and point.'  
 Deal but with moral mathematics so—  
 Master one merest moment's work of mine,  
 Even this practising with pen and ink,—  
 Demonstrate why I rather plied the quill  
 Than left the space a blank,—you gain a fact,  
 And God knows what a fact 's worth! So proceed  
 By inference from just this moral fact  
 —I don't say, to that plaguy quadrature  
 'What the whole man meant, whom you wish you knew.'  
 But, what meant certain things he did of old,  
 Which puzzled Europe,—why, you 'll find them plain,  
 This way, not otherwise: I guarantee,  
 Understand one, you comprehend the rest.  
 Rays from all round converge to any point:  
 Study the point then ere you track the rays!

The size o' the circle 's nothing; subdivide  
Earth, and earth's smallest grain of mustard-seed,  
You count as many parts, small matching large,  
If you can use the mind's eye: otherwise,  
Material optics, being gross at best,  
Prefer the large and leave our mind the small—  
And pray how many folk have minds can see?  
Certainly you—and somebody in Thrace  
Whose name escapes me at the moment. You—  
Lend me your mind then! Analyse with me  
This instance of the line 'twixt blot and blot  
I rather chose to draw than leave a blank,  
Things else being equal. You are taught thereby  
That 't is my nature, when I am at ease,  
Rather than idle out my life too long,  
To want to do a thing—to put a thought,  
Whether a great thought or a little one,  
Into an act, as nearly as may be.  
Make what is absolutely new—I can't,  
Mar what is made already well enough—  
I won't: but turn to best account the thing  
That 's half-made—that I can. Two blots, you saw  
I knew how to extend into a line  
Symmetric on the sheet they blurred before—  
Such little act sufficed, this time, such thought.

Now, we 'll extend rays, widen out the verge,  
Describe a large circle; leave this first  
Clod of an instance we began with, rise  
To the complete world many clods effect.  
Only continue patient while I throw,  
Delver-like, spadeful after spadeful up,  
Just as truths come, the subsoil of me, mould  
Whence spring my moods: your object,—just to find,  
Alike from handlift and from barrow-load,  
What salts and silts may constitute the earth—  
If it be proper stuff to blow man glass,  
Or bake him pottery, bear him oaks or wheat—  
What 's born of me, in brief; which found, all 's known  
If it were genius did the digging-job,  
Logic would speedily sift its product smooth  
And leave the crude truths bare for poetry;  
But I 'm no poet, and am stiff i' the back.

What one spread fails to bring, another may.  
In goes the shovel and out comes scoop—as here!

I live to please myself. I recognize  
Power passing mine, immeasurable, God—  
Above me, whom He made, as heaven beyond  
Earth—to use figures which assist our sense.  
I know that He is there as I am here,  
By the same proof, which seems no proof at all,  
It so exceeds familiar forms of proof.  
Why 'there,' not 'here'? Because, when I say 'there,'  
I treat the feeling with distincter shape  
That space exists between us: I,—not He,—  
Live, think, do human work here—no machine,  
His will moves, but a being by myself,  
His, and not He who made me for a work,  
Watches my working, judges its effect,  
But does not interpose. He did so once,  
And probably will again some time—not now  
Life being the minute of mankind, not God's,  
In a certain sense, like time before and time  
After man's earthly life, so far as man  
Needs apprehend the matter. Am I clear?  
Suppose I bid a courier take to-night  
(. . . Once for all, let me talk as if I smoked  
Yet in the Residenz, a personage:  
I must still represent the thing I was,  
Galvanically make dead muscle play,  
Or how shall I illustrate muscle's use?)  
I could then, last July, bid courier take  
Message for me, post-haste, a thousand miles.  
I bid him, since I have the right to bid,  
And, my part done so far, his part begins;  
He starts with due equipment, will and power,  
Means he may use, misuse, not use at all,  
At his discretion, at his peril too.  
I leave him to himself: but, journey done,  
I count the minutes, call for the result  
In quickness and the courier quality,  
Weigh its worth, and then punish or reward  
According to proved service; not before.  
Meantime, he sleeps through noontide, rides till dawn,  
Sticks to the straight road, tries the crooked path,

Measures and manages resource, trusts, doubts  
Advisers by the wayside, does his best  
At his discretion, lags or launches forth,  
(He knows and I know) at his peril too.  
You see? Exactly thus men stand to God:  
I with my courier, God with me. Just so  
I have His bidding to perform; but mind  
And body, all of me, though made and meant  
For that sole service, must consult, concert  
With my own self and nobody beside,  
How to effect the same: God helps not else.  
'T is I who, with my stock of craft and strength,  
Choose the directer cut across the hedge,  
Or keep the foot-track that respects a crop.  
Lie down and rest, rise up and run,—live spare,  
Feed free,—all that 's my business: but, arrive,  
Deliver message, bring the answer back,  
And make my bow, I must: then God will speak,  
Praise me or haply blame as service proves.  
To other men, to each and every one,  
Another law! what likelier? God, perchance,  
Grants each new man, by some as new a mode,  
Intercommunication with Himself,  
Wreaking on finiteness infinitude;  
By such a series of effects, gives each  
Last His own imprint: old yet ever new  
The process: 't is the way of Deity.  
How it succeeds, He knows: I only know  
That varied modes of creatureship abound,  
Implying just as varied intercourse  
For each with the creator of them all.  
Each has his own mind and no other's mode.  
What mode may yours be? I shall sympathize!  
No doubt, you, good young lady that you are,  
Despite a natural naughtiness or two,  
Turn eyes up like a Pradier Magdalen  
And see an outspread providential hand  
Above the owl's-wing aigrette—guard and guide—  
Visibly o'er your path, about your bed,  
Through all your practisings with London-town.  
It points, you go; it stays fixed, and you stop;  
You quicken its procedure by a word  
Spoken, a thought in silence, prayer and praise

Well, I believe that such a hand may stoop,  
 And such appeals to it may stave off harm,  
 Pacify the grim guardian of this Square,  
 And stand you in good stead on quarter-day:  
 Quite possible in your case; not in mine.  
 'Ah, but I choose to make the difference,  
 Find the emancipation?' No, I hope!  
 If I deceive myself, take noon for night,  
 Please to become determinedly blind  
 To the true ordinance of human life,  
 Through mere presumption—that is my affair,  
 And truly a grave one; but as grave I think  
 Your affair, yours, the specially observed,—  
 Each favoured person that perceives his path  
 Pointed him, inch by inch, and looks above  
 For guidance, through the mazes of this world,  
 In what we call its meanest life-career  
 —Not how to manage Europe properly,  
 But how keep open shop, and yet pay rent,  
 Rear household, and make both ends meet, the same.  
 I say, such man is no less tasked than I  
 To duly take the path appointed him  
 By whatsoever sign he recognize.  
 Our insincerity on both our heads!  
 No matter what the object of a life,  
 Small work or large,—the making thrive a shop,  
 Or seeing that an empire take no harm,—  
 There are known fruits to judge obedience by.  
 You 've read a ton's weight, now, of newspaper—  
 Lives of me, gabble about the kind of prince—  
 You know my work i' the rough; I ask you, then,  
 Do I appear subordinated less  
 To hand-impulsion, one prime push for all,  
 Than little lives of men, the multitude  
 That cried out, every quarter of an hour,  
 For fresh instructions, did or did not work,  
 And praised in the odd minutes?

Eh, my dear?

Such is the reason why I acquiesced  
 In doing what seemed best for me to do,  
 So as to please myself on the great scale,  
 Having regard to immortality



No less than life—did that which head and heart  
Prescribed my hand, in measure with its means  
Of doing—used my special stock of power—  
Not from the aforesaid head and heart alone.  
But every sort of helpful circumstance,  
Some problematic and some nondescript:  
All regulated by the single care  
I' the last resort—that I made thoroughly serve  
The when and how, toiled where was need, reposed  
As resolutely at the proper point,  
Braved sorrow, courted joy, to just one end:  
Namely, that just the creature I was bound  
To be, I should become, nor thwart at all  
God's purpose in creation. I conceive  
No other duty possible to man,—  
Highest mind, lowest mind, no other law  
By which to judge life failure or success:  
What folk call being saved or cast away.

Such was my rule of life: I worked my best  
Subject to ultimate judgment, God's not man's  
Well then, this settled,—take your tea, I beg,  
And meditate the fact, 'twixt sip and sip,—  
This settled—why I pleased myself, you saw,  
By turning blot and blot into a line,  
O' the little scale,—we'll try now (as your tongue  
Tries the concluding sugar-drop) what 's meant  
To please me most o' the great scale. Why, just now,  
With nothing else to do within my reach,  
Did I prefer making two blots one line  
To making yet another separate  
Third blot, and leaving those I found unlinked?  
It meant, I like to use the thing I find,  
Rather than strive at unfound novelty:  
I make the best of the old, nor try for new.  
Such will to act, such choice of action's way,  
Constitute—when at work on the great scale,  
Driven to their farthest natural consequence  
By all the help from all the means—my own  
Particular faculty of serving God,  
Instinct for putting power to exercise  
Upon some wish and want o' the time, I prove  
Possible to mankind as best I may.

This constitutes my mission,—grant the phrase,—  
 Namely, to rule men—men within my reach,  
 To order, influence and dispose them so  
 As render solid and stabilify  
 Mankind in particles, the light and loose,  
 For their good and my pleasure in the act.  
 Such good accomplished proves twice good to me—  
 Good for its own sake, as the just and right,  
 And, in the effecting also, good again  
 To me its agent, tasked as suits my taste.

Is this much easy to be understood  
 At first glance? Now begin the steady gaze!

My rank—(if I must tell you simple truth—  
 Telling were else not worth the whiff o' the weed  
 I lose for the tale's sake)—dear, my rank i' the world  
 Is hard to know and name precisely: err  
 I may, but scarcely over-estimate  
 My style and title. Do I class with men  
 Most useful to their fellows? Possibly,—  
 Therefore, in some sort, best; but, greatest mind  
 And rarest nature? Evidently no.  
 A conservator, call me, if you please,  
 Not a creator nor destroyer: one  
 Who keeps the world safe. I profess to trace  
 The broken circle of society,  
 Dim actual order, I can redescribe  
 Not only where some segment silver-true  
 Stays clear, but where the breaks of black commence  
 Baffling you all who want the eye to probe—  
 As I make out yon problematic thin  
 White paring of your thumb-nail outside there,  
 Above the plaster-monarch on his steed—  
 See an inch, name an ell, and prophecy  
 O' the rest that ought to follow, the round moon  
 Now hiding in the night of things: that round,  
 I labour to demonstrate moon enough  
 For the month's purpose,—that society,  
 Render efficient for the age's need:  
 Preserving you in either case the old,  
 Nor aiming at a new and greater thing,  
 A sun for moon, a future to be made

By first abolishing the present law:  
No such proud task for me by any means!  
History shows you men whose master-touch  
Not so much modifies as makes anew:  
Minds that transmute nor need restore at all.  
A breath of God made manifest in flesh  
Subjects the world to change, from time to time  
Alters the whole conditions of our race  
Abruptly, not by unperceived degrees  
Nor play of elements already there,  
But quite new leaven, leavening the lump,  
And liker, so, the natural process. See!  
Where winter reigned for ages—by a turn  
I' the time, some star-change, (ask geologists)  
The ice-tracts split, clash, splinter and disperse  
And there's an end of immobility,  
Silence, and all that tinted pageant, base  
To pinnacle, one flush from fairyland  
Dead-asleep and deserted somewhere,—see!—  
As a fresh sun, wave, spring and joy outburst.  
Or else the earth it is, time starts from trance,  
Her mountains tremble into fire, her plains  
Heave blinded by confusion: what result?  
New teeming growth, surprises of strange life  
Impossible before, a world broke up  
And re-made, order gained by law destroyed.  
Not otherwise, in our society  
Follow like portents, all as absolute  
Regenerations: they have birth at rare  
Uncertain unexpected intervals  
O' the world, by ministry impossible  
Before and after fullness of the days:  
Some dervish desert-spectre, swordsman, saint,  
Law-giver, lyrist,—oh, we know the names!  
Quite other these than I. Our time requires  
No such strange potentate,—who else would dawn,—  
No fresh force till the old have spent itself.  
Such seems the natural economy.  
To shoot a beam into the dark, assists:  
To make that beam do fuller service, spread  
And utilize such bounty to the height,  
That assists also,—and that work is mine.  
I recognize, contemplate, and approve

The general compact of society,  
 Not simply as I see effected good,  
 But good i' the germ, each chance that 's possible  
 I' the plan traced so far: all results, in short,  
 For better or worse of the operation due  
 To those exceptional natures, unlike mine,  
 Who, helping, thwarting, conscious, unaware,  
 Did somehow manage to so far describe  
 This diagram left ready to my hand.  
 Waiting my turn of trial. I see success,  
 See failure, see what makes or mars throughout.  
 How shall I else but help complete this plan  
 Of which I know the purpose and approve,  
 By letting stay therein what seems to stand,  
 And adding good thereto of easier reach  
 To-day than yesterday?

So much, no more!

Whereon, 'No more than that?'—inquire aggrieved  
 Half of my critics: 'nothing new at all?  
 The old plan saved, instead of a sponged slate  
 And fresh-drawn figure?'—while, 'So much as that?'  
 Object their fellows of the other faith:  
 'Leave uneffaced the crazy labyrinth  
 Of alteration and amendment, lines  
 Which every dabster felt in duty bound  
 To signalize his power of pen and ink  
 By adding to a plan once plain enough?  
 Why keep each fool's bequeathment, scratch and blur  
 Which overscawl and underscore the piece—  
 Nay, strengthen them by touches of your own?'

Well, that 's my mission, so I serve the world,  
 Figure as man o' the moment,—in default  
 Of somebody inspired to strike such change  
 Into society—from round to square,  
 The ellipsis to the rhomboid, how you please,  
 As suits the size and shape o' the world he finds.  
 But this I can,—and nobody my peer,—  
 Do the best with the least change possible:  
 Carry the incompleteness on, a stage,  
 Make what was crooked straight, and roughness smooth,  
 And weakness strong: wherein if I succeed,

It will not prove the worst achievement, sure,  
In the eyes at least of one man, one I look  
Nowise to catch in critic company:  
To-wit, the man inspired, the genius' self  
Destined to come and change things thoroughly.  
He, at least, finds his business simplified,  
Distinguishes the done from undone, reads  
Plainly what meant and did not mean this time  
We live in, and I work on, and transmit  
To such successor: he will operate  
On good hard substance, not mere shade and shine.  
Let all my critics, born to idleness  
And impotency, get their good, and have  
Their hooting at the giver: I am deaf—  
Who find great good in this society,  
Great gain, the purchase of great labour. Touch  
The work I may and must, but—reverent  
In every fall o' the finger-tip, no doubt.  
Perhaps I find all good there's warrant for  
I' the world as yet: nay, to the end of time,—  
Since evil never means part company  
With mankind, only shift side and change shape.  
I find advance i' the main, and notably  
The Present an improvement on the Past,  
And promise for the Future—which shall prove  
Only the Present with its rough made smooth,  
Its indistinctness emphasized; I hope  
No better, nothing newer for mankind,  
But something equably smoothed everywhere,  
Good, reconciled with hardly-quite-as-good,  
Instead of good and bad each jostling each.  
'And that's all?' Ay, and quite enough for me!  
We have toiled so long to gain what gain I find  
I' the Present,—let us keep it! We shall toil  
So long before we gain—if gain God grant—  
A Future with one touch of difference  
I' the heart of things, and not their outside face,—  
Let us not risk the whiff of my cigar  
Four Fourier, Comte, and all that ends in smoke!

This I see clearest probably of men  
With power to act and influence, now alive:  
Juster than they to the true state of things;

In consequence, more tolerant that, side  
 By side, shall co-exist and thrive alike  
 In the age, the various sorts of happiness  
 Moral, mark!—not material—moods o' the mind  
 Suited to man and man his opposite:  
 Say, minor modes of movement—hence to there,  
 Or thence to here, or simply round about—  
 So long as each toe spares its neighbour's kibe,  
 Nor spoils the major march and main advance.  
 The love of peace, care for the family,  
 Contentment with what 's bad but might be worse—  
 Good movements these! and good, too, discontent,  
 So long as that spurs good, which might be best,  
 Into becoming better, anyhow:  
 Good—pride of country, putting hearth and home  
 I' the back-ground, out of undue prominence:  
 Good—yearning after change, strife, victory,  
 And triumph. Each shall have its orbit marked,  
 But no more,—none impede the other's path  
 In this wide world,—though each and all alike  
 Save for me, fain would spread itself through space  
 And leave its fellow not an inch of way.  
 I rule and regulate the course, excite,  
 Restrain: because the whole machine should march  
 Impelled by those diversely-moving parts,  
 Each blind to aught beside its little bent.  
 Out of the turnings round and round inside,  
 Comes that straightforward world-advance, I want,  
 And none of them supposes God wants too  
 And gets through just their hindrance and my help.  
 I think that to have held the balance straight  
 For twenty years, say, weighing claim and claim,  
 And giving each its due, no less no more,  
 This was good service to humanity,  
 Right usage of my power in head and heart,  
 And reasonable piety beside.  
 Keep those three points in mind while judging me!  
 You stand, perhaps, for some one man, not men,—  
 Represent this or the other interest,  
 Nor mind the general welfare,—so, impugn  
 My practice and dispute my value: why?  
 You man of faith, I did not tread the world  
 Into a paste, and thereof make a smooth



Uniform mound whereon to plant your flag,  
The lily-white, above the blood and brains!  
Nor yet did I, you man of faithlessness,  
So roll things to the level which you love,  
That you could stand at ease there and survey  
The universal Nothing undisgraced  
By pert obtrusion of some old church-spire  
I' the distance! Neither friend would I content,  
Nor, as the world were simply meant for him,  
Thrust out his fellow and mend God's mistake.  
Why, you two fools,—my dear friends all the same,—  
Is it some change o' the world and nothing else  
Contents you? Should whatever was, not be?  
How thanklessly you view things! There 's the root  
Of the evil, source of the entire mistake:  
You see no worth i' the world, nature and life,  
Unless we change what is to what may be,  
Which means,—may be, i' the brain of one of you!  
'Reject what is?'—all capabilities—  
Nay, you may style them chances if you choose—  
All chances, then, of happiness that lie  
Open to anybody that is born,  
Tumbles into this life and out again,—  
All that may happen, good and evil too,  
I' the space between, to each adventurer  
Upon this 'sixty, Anno Domini:  
A life to live—and such a life! a world  
To learn, one's lifetime in,—and such a world!  
How did the foolish ever pass for wise  
By calling life a burden, man a fly  
Or worm or what 's most insignificant?  
'O littleness of man!' deplores the bard;  
And then, for fear the Powers should punish him,  
'O grandeur of the visible universe  
Our human littleness contrasts withal!  
O sun, O moon, ye mountains and thou sea,  
Thou emblem of immensity, thou this,  
That, and the other,—what impertinence  
In man to eat and drink and walk about  
And have his little notions of his own,  
The while some wave sheds foam upon the shore!  
First of all, 't is a lie some three-times thick:  
The bard,—this sort of speech being poetry,—

The bard puts mankind well outside himself  
 'And then begins instructing them: 'This way  
 I and my friend the sea conceive of you!  
 What would you give to think such thoughts as ours  
 Of you and the sea together?' Down they go  
 On the humbled knees of them: at once they draw  
 Distinction, recognize no mate of theirs  
 In one, despite his mock humility,  
 So plain a match for what he plays with. Next,  
 The turn of the great ocean-playfellow,  
 When the bard, leaving Bond Street very far  
 From ear-shot, cares not to ventriloquize,  
 But tells the sea its home-truths: 'You, my match?  
 You, all this terror and immensity  
 And what not? Shall I tell you what you are?  
 Just fit to hitch into a stanza, so  
 Wake up and set in motion who's asleep  
 O' the other side of you in England, else  
 Unaware, as folk pace their Bond Street now,  
 Somebody here despises them so much!  
 Between us,—they are the ultimate! to them  
 And their perception go these lordly thoughts:  
 Since what were ocean—mane and tail, to boot—  
 Mused I not here, how make thoughts thinkable?  
 Start forth my stanza and astound the world!  
 Back, billows, to your insignificance!  
 Deep, you are done with!'

Learn, my gifted friend,  
 There are two things i' the world, still wiser folk  
 Accept—intelligence and sympathy.  
 You pant about unutterable power  
 I' the ocean, all you feel but cannot speak?  
 Why, that's the plainest speech about it all.  
 You did not feel what was not to be felt.  
 Well, then, all else but what man feels is nought—  
 The wash o' the liquor that o'erbrims the cup  
 Called man, and runs to waste adown his side,  
 Perhaps to feed a cataract,—who cares?  
 I'll tell you: all the more I know mankind,  
 The more I thank God, like my grandmother,  
 For making me a little lower than  
 The angels, honour-clothed and glory-crowned

This is the honour,—that no thing I know,  
Feel or conceive, but I can make my own  
Somehow, by use of hand or head or heart:  
This is the glory,—that in all conceived,  
Or felt or known, I recognize a mind  
Not mine but like mine,—for the double joy,—  
Making all things for me and me for Him.  
There 's folly for you at this time of day!  
So think it! and enjoy your ignorance  
Of what—no matter for the worthy's name—  
Wisdom set working in a noble heart,  
When he, who was earth's best geometer  
Up to that time of day, consigned his life  
With its results into one matchless book,  
The triumph of the human mind so far,  
All in geometry man yet could do:  
And then wrote on the dedication-page  
In place of name the universe applauds,  
'But, God, what a geometer art Thou!'  
I suppose Heaven is, through Eternity,  
The equalizing, ever and anon,  
In momentary rapture, great with small,  
Omniscience with intelligency, God  
With man,—the thunder-glow from pole to pole  
Abolishing, a blissful moment-space,  
Great cloud alike and small cloud, in one fire—  
As sure to ebb as sure again to flow  
When the new receptivity deserves  
The new completion. There 's the Heaven for me.  
And I say, therefore, to live out one's life  
I' the world here, with the chance,—whether by pain  
Or pleasure be the process, long or short  
The time, august or mean the circumstance  
To human eye,—of learning how set foot  
Decidedly on some one path to Heaven,  
Touch segment in the circle whence all lines  
Lead to the centre equally, red lines  
Or black lines, so they but produce themselves—  
This, I do say,—and here my sermon ends,—  
This makes it worth our while to tenderly  
Handle a state of things which mend we might,  
Mar we may, but which meanwhile helps so far.  
Therefore my end is—save society!

'And that's all?' twangs the never-failing taunt  
 O' the foe—'No novelty, creativeness,  
 Mark of the master that renews the age?'  
 'Nay, all that?' rather will demur my judge.  
 I look to hear some day, nor friend nor foe—  
 'Did you attain, then, to perceive that God  
 Knew what He undertook when He made things?'  
 Ay: that my task was to co-operate  
 Rather than play the rival, chop and change  
 The order whence comes all the good we know,  
 With this,—good's last expression to our sense,—  
 That there's a further good conceivable  
 Beyond the utmost earth can realize:  
 And, therefore, that to change the agency,  
 The evil whereby good is brought about—  
 Try to make good do good as evil does—  
 Were just as if a chemist, wanting white,  
 And knowing black ingredients bred the dye,  
 Insisted these too should be white forsooth!  
 Correct the evil, mitigate your best,  
 Blend mild with harsh, and soften black to grey  
 If grey may follow with no detriment  
 To the eventual perfect purity!  
 But as for hazarding the main result  
 By hoping to anticipate one half  
 In the intermediate process,—no, my friends!  
 This bad world, I experience and approve;  
 Your good world,—with no pity, courage, hope,  
 Fear, sorrow, joy,—devotedness, in short,  
 Which I account the ultimate of man,  
 Of which there's not one day nor hour but brings,  
 In flower or fruit, some sample of success,  
 Out of this same society I save—  
 None of it for me! That I might have none,  
 I rapped your tampering knuckles twenty years.  
 Such was the task imposed me, such my end.  
 Now for the means thereto. Ah, confidence—  
 Keep we together or part company?  
 This is the critical minute! 'Such my end?'  
 Certainly; how could it be otherwise?  
 Can there be question which was the right task—  
 To save or to destroy society?  
 Why, even prove that, by some miracle,

Destruction were the proper work to choose,  
 And that a torch best remedies what 's wrong  
 I' the temple, whence the long procession wound  
 Of powers and beauties, earth's achievements all,  
 The human strength that strove and overthrew,—  
 The human love that, weak itself, crowned strength,—  
 The instinct crying 'God is whence I came!'—  
 The reason laying down the law 'And such  
 His will i' the world must be!'—the leap and shout  
 Of genius 'For I hold His very thoughts,  
 The meaning of the mind of Him!'—nay, more,  
 The ingenuities, each active force  
 That turning in a circle on itself  
 Looks neither up nor down but keeps the spot,  
 Mere creature-like, and, for religion, works,  
 Works only and works ever, makes and shapes  
 And changes, still wrings more of good from less,  
 Still stamps some bad out, where was worst before,  
 So leaves the handiwork, the act and deed,  
 Were it but house and land and wealth, to show  
 Here was a creature perfect in the kind—  
 Whether as bee, beaver, or behemoth,  
 What 's the importance? he has done his work  
 For work's sake, worked well, earned a creature's  
 praise;—

I say, concede that same fane, whence deploys  
 Age after age, all this humanity,  
 Diverse but ever dear, out of the dark  
 Behind the altar into the broad day  
 By the portal—enter, and, concede there mocks  
 Each lover of free motion and much space  
 A perplexed length of apse and aisle and nave,—  
 Pillared roof and carved screen, and what care I?—  
 Which irk the movement and impede the march,—  
 Nay, possibly, bring flat upon his nose  
 At some odd break-neck angle, by some freak  
 Of old-world artistry, that personage  
 Who, could he but have kept his skirts from grief  
 And catching at the hooks and crooks about,  
 Had stepped out on the daylight of our time  
 Plainly the man of the age,—still, still, I bar  
 Excessive conflagration in the case.

'Shake the flame freely!' shout the multitude:

The architect approves I stuck my torch  
 Inside a good stout lantern, hung its light  
 Above the hooks and crooks, and ended so.  
 To save society was well: the means  
 Whereby to save it,—there begins the doubt  
 Permitted you, imperative on me;  
 Were mine the best means? Did I work aright  
 With powers appointed me?—since powers denied  
 Concern me nothing.

Well, my work reviewed  
 Fairly, leaves more hope than discouragement.  
 First, there 's the deed done: what I found, I leave,—  
 What tottered, I kept stable: if it stand  
 One month, without sustainment, still thank me  
 The twenty years' sustainer! Now, observe,  
 Sustaining is no brilliant self-display  
 Like knocking down or even setting up:  
 Much bustle these necessitate; and still  
 To vulgar eye, the mightier of the myth  
 Is Hercules, who substitutes his own  
 For Atlas' shoulder and supports the globe  
 A whole day,—not the passive and obscure  
 Atlas who bore, ere Hercules was born,  
 And is to go on bearing that same load  
 When Hercules turns ash on Cæta's top.  
 'T is the transition-stage, the tug and strain,  
 That strike men: standing still is stupid-like.  
 My pressure was too constant on the whole  
 For any part's eruption into space  
 Mid sparkles, crackling, and much praise of me.  
 I saw that, in the ordinary life,  
 Many of the little make a mass of men  
 Important beyond greatness here and there;  
 As certainly as, in life exceptional,  
 When old things terminate and new commence,  
 A solitary great man 's worth the world.  
 God takes the business into His own hands  
 At such time: who creates the novel flower  
 Contrives to guard and give it breathing-room:  
 I merely tend the corn-field, care for crop,  
 And weed no acre thin to let emerge  
 What prodigy may stifle there perchance.



—No, though my eye have noted where he lurks,  
Oh those mute myriads that spoke loud to me—  
The eyes that craved to see the light, the mouths  
That sought the daily bread and nothing more,  
The hands that supplicated exercise,  
Men that had wives, and women that had babes,  
And all these making suit to only live!  
Was I to turn aside from husbandry,  
Leave hope of harvest for the corn, my care,  
To play at horticulture, rear some rose  
Or poppy into perfect leaf and bloom  
When, mid the furrows, up was pleased to sprout  
Some man, cause, system, special interest  
I ought to study, stop the world meanwhile?  
'But I am Liberty, Philanthropy,  
Enlightenment, or Patriotism, the power  
Whereby you are to stand or fall!' cries each:  
'Mine and mine only be the flag you flaunt!'  
And, when I venture to object 'Meantime,  
What of yon myriads with no flag at all—  
My crop which, who flaunts flag must tread across?'  
'Now, this it is to have a puny mind!'  
Admire my mental prodigies: 'down—down—  
Ever at home o' the level and the low,  
There bides he brooding! Could he look above,  
With less of the owl and more of the eagle eye,  
He'd see there's no way helps the little cause  
Like the attainment of the great. Dare first  
The chief emprise; dispel yon cloud between  
The sun and us; nor fear that, though our heads  
Find earlier warmth and comfort from his ray,  
What lies about our feet, the multitude,  
Will fail of benefaction presently.  
Come now, let each of us awhile cry truce  
To special interests, make common cause  
Against the adversary—or perchance  
Mere dullard to his own plain interest!  
Which of us will you choose?—since needs must be  
Some one o' the warring causes you incline  
To hold, i' the main, has right and should prevail:  
Why not adopt and give it prevalence?  
Choose strict Faith or lax Incredulity,—  
King, Caste and Cultus—or the Rights of Man,

Sovereignty of each Proudhon o'er himself,  
 And all that follows in just consequence!  
 Go free the stranger from a foreign yoke;  
 Or stay, concentrate energy at home;  
 Succeed!—when he deserves, the stranger will.  
 Comply with the Great Nation's impulse, print  
 By force of arms,—since reason pleads in vain,  
 And, mid the sweet compulsion, pity weeps,—  
 Hohenstiel-Schwangau on the universe!  
 Snub the Great Nation, cure the impulsive itch  
 With smartest fillip on a restless nose  
 Was ever launched by thumb and finger! Bid  
 Hohenstiel-Schwangau first repeal the tax  
 On pig-tails and pomatum, and then mind  
 Abstruser matters for next century!  
 Is your choice made? Why then, act up to choice!  
 Leave the illogical touch now here now there  
 I' the way of work, the tantalizing help  
 First to this, then the other opposite:  
 The blowing hot and cold, sham policy,  
 Sure ague of the mind and nothing more,  
 Disease of the perception or the will,  
 That fain would hide in a fine name! Your choice,  
 Speak it out and condemn yourself thereby!'

Well, Leicester-square is not the Residenz:  
 Instead of shrugging shoulder, turning friend  
 The deaf ear, with a wink to the police—  
 I'll answer—by a question, wisdom's mode.  
 How many years, o' the average, do men  
 Live in this world? Some score, say computists.  
 Quintuple me that term and give mankind  
 The likely hundred, and with all my heart  
 I'll take your task upon me, work your way,  
 Concentrate energy on some one cause:  
 Since, counsellor, I also have my cause,  
 My flag, my faith in its effect, my hope  
 In its eventual triumph for the good  
 O' the world. And once upon a time, when I  
 Was like all you, mere voice and nothing more,  
 Myself took wings, soared sunward, and thence sang  
 'Look where I live i' the loft, come up to me,  
 Groundlings, nor grovel longer! gain this height,

And prove you breathe here better than below!  
Why, what emancipation far and wide  
Will follow in a trice! They too can soar,  
Each tenant of the earth's circumference  
Claiming to elevate humanity,  
They also must attain such altitude,  
Live in the luminous circle that surrounds  
The planet, not the leaden orb itself.  
Press out, each point, from surface to yon verge  
Which one has gained and guaranteed your realm!  
Ay, still my fragments wander, music-fraught,  
Sighs of the soul, mine once, mine now, and mine  
For ever! Crumbled arch, crushed aqueduct,  
Alive with tremors in the shaggy growth  
Of wild-wood, crevice-sown, that triumphs there  
Imparting exultation to the hills!  
Sweep of the swathe when only the winds walk  
And waft my words above the grassy sea  
Under the blinding blue that basks o'er Rome,—  
Hear ye not still—'Be Italy again'?  
And ye, what strikes the panic to your heart?  
Decrepit council-chambers,—where some lamp  
Drives the unbroken black three paces off  
From where the greybeards huddle in debate,  
Dim cowls and capes, and midmost glimmers one  
Like tarnished gold, and what they say is doubt,  
And what they think is fear, and what suspends  
The breath in them is not the plaster-patch  
Time disengages from the painted wall  
Where Rafael moulderingly bids adieu,  
Nor tick of the insect turning tapestry  
Which a queen's finger traced of old, to dust;  
But some word, resonant, redoubtable,  
Of who once felt upon his head a hand  
Whereof the head now apprehends his foot.  
'Light in Rome, Law in Rome, and Liberty  
O' the soul in Rome—the free Church, the free State!  
Stamp out the nature that 's best typified  
By its embodiment in Peter's Dome,  
The scorpion body with the greedy pair  
Of outstretched nippers, either colonnade  
Agape for the advance of heads and hearts!  
There 's one cause for you! one and only one,

For I am vocal through the universe,  
 I' the workshop, manufactory, exchange  
 And market-place, sea-port and custom-house  
 O' the frontier: listen if the echoes die—  
 'Unfettered commerce! Power to speak and hear.  
 And print and read! The universal vote!  
 Its rights for labour!' This, with much beside,  
 I spoke when I was voice and nothing more,  
 But altogether such an one as you  
 My censors. 'Voice, and nothing more, indeed!'  
 Re-echoes round me: 'that's the censure, there's  
 Involved the ruin of you soon or late!  
 Voice,—when its promise beat the empty air:  
 And nothing more,—when solid earth's your stage,  
 And we desiderate performance, deed  
 For word, the realizing all you dreamed  
 In the old days: now, for deed, we find at door  
 O' the council-chamber posted, mute as mouse,  
 Hohenstiel-Schwangau, sentry and safeguard  
 O' the greybeards all a-chuckle, cowl to cape,  
 Who challenge Judas,—that's endearment's style,—  
 To stop their mouths or let escape grimace,  
 While they keep cursing Italy and him.  
 The power to speak, hear, print and read is ours?  
 Ay, we learn where and how, when clapped inside  
 A convict-transport bound for cool Cayenne!  
 The universal vote we have: its urn,  
 We also have where votes drop, fingered-o'er  
 By the universal Prefect. Say, Trade's free  
 And Toil turned master out o' the slave it was:  
 What then? These feed man's stomach, but his soul  
 Craves finer fare, nor lives by bread alone,  
 As somebody says somewhere. Hence you stand  
 Proved and recorded either false or weak,  
 Faulty in promise or performance: which?'  
 Neither, I hope. Once pedestalled on earth,  
 To act not speak, I found earth was not air.  
 I saw that multitude of mine, and not  
 The nakedness and nullity of air  
 Fit only for a voice to float in free.  
 Such eyes I saw that craved the light alone,  
 Such mouths that wanted bread and nothing else,  
 Such hands that supplicated handiwork,

Men with the wives, and women with the babes,  
Yet all these pleading just to live, not die!  
Did I believe one whit less in belief,  
Take truth for falsehood, wish the voice revoked  
That told the truth to heaven for earth to hear?  
No, this should be, and shall; but when and how?  
At what expense to these who average  
Your twenty years of life, my computists?  
'Not bread alone' but bread before all else  
For these: the bodily want serve first, said I:  
If earth-space and the life-time help not here,  
Where is the good of body having been?  
But, helping body, if we somewhat baulk  
The soul of finer fare, such food 's to find  
Elsewhere and afterward—all indicates,  
Even this self-same fact that soul can starve  
Yet body still exist its twenty years:  
While, stint the body, there 's an end at once  
O' the revel in the fancy that Rome 's free,  
And superstition 's fettered, and one prints  
Whate'er one pleases and who pleases reads  
The same, and speaks out and is spoken to,  
And divers hundred thousand fools may vote  
A vote untampered with by one wise man,  
And so elect Barabbas deputy  
In lieu of his concurrent. I who trace  
The purpose written on the face of things,  
For my behoof and guidance—(whoso needs  
No such sustainment, sees beneath my signs,  
Proves, what I take for writing, penmanship,  
Scribble and flourish with no sense for me  
O' the sort I solemnly go spelling out,—  
Let him! there 's certain work of mine to show  
Alongside his work: which gives warranty  
Of shrewder vision in the workman—judge!)  
I who trace Providence without a break  
I' the plan of things, drop plumb on this plain print  
Of an intention with a view to good,  
That man is made in sympathy with man  
At outset of existence, so to speak;  
But in dissociation, more and more,  
Man from his fellow, as their lives advance  
In culture; still humanity, that 's born

A mass, keeps flying off, fining away  
 Ever into a multitude of points,  
 And ends in isolation, each from each:  
 Peerless above i' the sky, the pinnacle,—  
 Absolute contact, fusion, all below  
 At the base of being. How comes this about?  
 This stamp of God characterizing man  
 And nothing else but man in the universe—  
 That, while he feels with man (to use man's speech)  
 I' the little things of life, its fleshly wants  
 Of food and rest and health and happiness,  
 Its simplest spirit-motions, loves and hates,  
 Hopes, fears, soul-cravings on the ignoblest scale,  
 O' the fellow-creature,—owns the bond at base,—  
 He tends to freedom and divergency  
 In the upward progress, plays the pinnacle  
 When life's at greatest (grant again the phrase!  
 Because there's neither great nor small in life).  
 'Consult thou for thy kind that have the eyes  
 To see, the mouths to eat, the hands to work,  
 Men with the wives, and women with the babes!'—  
 Prompts Nature. 'Care thou for thyself alone  
 I' the conduct of the mind God made thee with!  
 Think, as if man had never thought before!  
 Act, as if all creation hung attent  
 On the acting of such faculty as thine,  
 To take prime pattern from thy masterpiece!'—  
 Nature prompts also: neither law obeyed  
 To the uttermost by any heart and soul  
 We know or have in record: both of them  
 Acknowledged blindly by whatever man  
 We ever knew or heard of in this world.  
 'Will you have why and wherefore, and the fact  
 Made plain as pikestaff?' modern Science asks.  
 'That mass man sprung from was a jelly-lump  
 Once on a time; he kept an after course  
 Through fish and insect, reptile, bird and beast,  
 Till he attained to be an ape at last  
 Or last but one. And if this doctrine shock  
 In aught the natural pride.' . . . Friend, banish fear,  
 The natural humility replies!  
 Do you suppose, even I, poor potentate,  
 Hohenstiel-Schwangau, who once ruled the roast,—



I was born able at all points to ply  
My tools? or did I have to learn my trade,  
Practise as exile ere perform as prince?  
The world knows something of my ups and downs:  
But grant me time, give me the management  
And manufacture of a model me,  
Me fifty-fold, a prince without a flaw,—  
Why, there 's no social grade, the sordidest,  
My embryo potentate should blink and scape.  
King, all the better he was cobbler once,  
He should know, sitting on the throne, how tastes  
Life to who sweeps the doorway. But life 's hard,  
Occasion rare; you cut probation short,  
And, being half-instructed, on the stage  
You shuffle through your part as best you can,  
And bless your stars, as I do. God takes time.  
I like the thought He should have lodged me once  
I' the hole, the cave, the hut, the tenement,  
The mansion and the palace; made me learn  
The feel o' the first, before I found myself  
Loftier i' the last, not more emancipate;  
From first to last of lodging, I was I,  
And not at all the place that harboured me.  
Do I refuse to follow farther yet  
I' the backwardness, repine if tree and flower,  
Mountain or streamlet were my dwelling-place  
Before I gained enlargement, grew mollusc?  
As well account that way for many a thrill  
Of kinship, I confess to, with the powers  
Called Nature: animate, inanimate,  
In parts or in the whole, there 's something there  
Man-like that somehow meets the man in me.  
My pulse goes altogether with the heart  
O' the Persian, that old Xerxes, when he stayed  
His march to conquest of the world, a day  
I' the desert, for the sake of one superb  
Plane tree which queened it there in solitude:  
Giving her neck its necklace, and each arm  
Its armlet, suiting soft waist, snowy side,  
With cincture and apparel. Yes, I lodged  
In those successive tenements; perchance  
Taste yet the straitness of them while I stretch  
Limb and enjoy new liberty the more.

And some abodes are lost or ruinous;  
 Some, patched-up and pieced-out, and so transformed  
 They still accommodate the traveller  
 His day of lifetime. O you count the links,  
 Descry no bar of the unbroken man?  
 Yes,—and who welds a lump of ore, suppose  
 He likes to make a chain and not a bar,  
 And reach by link on link, link small, link large,  
 Out to the due length—why, there 's forethought still  
 Outside o' the series, forging at one end,  
 While at the other there 's—no matter what  
 The kind of critical intelligence  
 Believing that last link had last but one  
 For parent, and no link was, first of all,  
 Fitted to anvil, hammered into shape.  
 Else, I accept the doctrine, and deduce  
 This duty, that I recognize mankind,  
 In all its height and depth and length and breadth.  
 Mankind i' the main have little wants, not large:  
 I, being of will and power to help, i' the main,  
 Mankind, must help the least wants first. My friend,  
 That is, my foe, without such power and will,  
 May plausibly concentrate all he wields,  
 And do his best at helping some large want,  
 Exceptionally noble cause, that 's seen  
 Subordinate enough from where I stand.  
 As he helps, I helped once, when like himself,  
 Unable to help better, work more wide;  
 And so would work with heart and hand to-day.  
 Did only computists confess a fault,  
 And multiply the single score by five,  
 Five only, give man's life its hundred years.  
 Change life, in me shall follow change to match!  
 Time were then, to work here, there, everywhere,  
 By turns and try experiment at ease!  
 Full time to mend as well as mar: why wait  
 The slow and sober uprising all around  
 O' the building? Let us run up, right to roof,  
 Some sudden marvel, piece of perfectness,  
 And testify what we intend the whole!  
 Is the world losing patience? 'Wait!' say we:  
 'There 's time: no generation needs to die  
 Unsolaced; you 've a century in store!'

But, no: I sadly let the voices wing  
Their way i' the upper vacancy, nor test  
Truth on this solid as I promised once.  
Well, and what is there to be sad about?  
The world 's the world, life 's life, and nothing else.  
'T is part of life, a property to prize,  
That those o' the higher sort engaged i' the world.  
Should fancy they can change its ill to good,  
Wrong to right, ugliness to beauty: find  
Enough success in fancy turning fact,  
To keep the sanguine kind in countenance  
And justify the hope that busies them:  
Failure enough,—to who can follow change  
Beyond their vision, see new good prove ill  
I' the consequence, see blacks and whites of life  
Shift square indeed, but leave the chequered face  
Unchanged i' the main,—failure enough for such,  
To bid ambition keep the whole from change,  
As their best service. I hope nought beside.  
No, my brave thinkers, whom I recognize,  
Gladly, myself the first, as, in a sense,  
All that our world 's worth, flower and fruit of man!  
Such minds myself award supremacy  
Over the common insignificance,  
When only Mind 's in question,—Body bows  
To quite another government, you know.  
Be Kant crowned king o' the castle in the air!  
Hans Slouch,—his own, and children's mouths to feed  
I' the hovel on the ground,—wants meat, nor chews  
*The Critique of Pure Reason* in exchange.  
But, now,—suppose I could allow your claims  
And quite change life to please you,—would it please?  
Would life comport with change and still be life?  
Ask, now, a doctor for a remedy:  
There 's his prescription. Bid him point you out  
Which of the five or six ingredients saves  
The sick man. 'Such the efficacy?  
Then why not dare and do things in one dose  
Simple and pure, all virtue, no alloy  
Of the idle drop and powder?' What 's his word?  
The efficacy, neat, were neutralized:  
It wants dispersing and retarding,—nay  
Is put upon its mettle, plays its part

Precisely through such hindrance everywhere,  
 Finds some mysterious give and take i' the case,  
 Some gain by opposition, he foregoes  
 Should he unfetter the medicament.  
 So with this thought of yours that fain would work  
 Free in the world: it wants just what it finds—  
 The ignorance, stupidity, the hate,  
 Envy and malice and uncharitableness  
 That bar your passage, break the flow of you  
 Down from those happy heights where many a cloud  
 Combined to give you birth and bid you be  
 The royalest of rivers: on you glide  
 Silverly till you reach the summit-edge,  
 Then over, on to all that ignorance,  
 Stupidity, hate, envy, bluffs and blocks,  
 Posted to fret you into foam and noise.  
 What of it? Up you mount in minute mist,  
 And bridge the chasm that crushed your quietude,  
 A spirit-rainbow, earthborn jewelry  
 Outsparkling the insipid firmament  
 Blue above Terni and its orange trees.  
 Do not mistake me! You, too, have your rights!  
 Hans must not burn Kant's house above his head  
 Because he cannot understand Kant's book:  
 And still less must Hans' pastor burn Kant's self  
 Because Kant understands some books too well.  
 But, justice seen to on this little point,  
 Answer me, is it manly, is it sage  
 To stop and struggle with arrangements here  
 It took so many lives, so much of toil,  
 To tinker up into efficiency?  
 Can't you contrive to operate at once,—  
 Since time is short and art is long,—to show  
 Your quality i' the world, whate'er you boast,  
 Without this fractious call on folks to crush  
 The world together just to set you free,  
 Admire the capers you will cut perchance,  
 Nor mind the mischief to your neighbours?

'Age!

Age and experience bring discouragement,  
 You taunt me: I maintain the opposite.  
 Am I discouraged who,—perceiving health,  
 Strength, beauty, as they tempt the eye of soul,

Are uncombinable with flesh and blood,—  
 Resolve to let my body live its best,  
 And leave my soul what better yet may be  
 Or not be, in this life or afterward?  
 —In either fortune, wiser than who waits  
 Till magic art procure a miracle.  
 In virtue of my very confidence  
 Mankind ought to outgrow its babyhood,  
 I prescribe rocking, deprecate rough hands,  
 While thus the cradle holds it past mistake.  
 Indeed, my task 's the harder—equable  
 Sustainment everywhere, all strain, no push—  
 Whereby friends credit me with indolence,  
 Apathy, hesitation. 'Stand stock-still  
 If able to move briskly? "All a-strain"—  
 So must we compliment your passiveness?  
 Sound asleep, rather!'

Just the judgment passed  
 Upon a statue, luckless like myself,  
 I saw at Rome once! 'T was some artist's whim  
 To cover all the accessories close  
 I' the group, and leave you only Laocoön  
 With neither sons nor serpents to denote  
 The purpose of his gesture. Then a crowd  
 Was called to try the question, criticize  
 Wherefore such energy of legs and arms,  
 Nay, eyeballs, starting from the socket. One—  
 I give him leave to write my history—  
 Only one said 'I think the gesture strives  
 Against some obstacle we cannot see.'  
 All the rest made their minds up. "'T is a yawn  
 Of sheer fatigue subsiding to repose:  
 The statue's "Somnolency" clear enough!'

There, my arch stranger-friend, my audience both  
 And arbitress, you have one half your wish,  
 At least: you know the thing I tried to do!  
 All, so far, to my praise and glory—all  
 Told as befits the self-apologist,—  
 Who ever promises a candid sweep  
 And clearness of those errors miscalled crimes  
 None knows more, none laments so much as he,

And ever rises from confession, proved  
 A god whose fault was—trying to be man.  
 Just so, fair judge,—if I read smile aright—  
 I condescend to figure in your eyes  
 As biggest heart and best of Europe's friends,  
 And hence my failure. God will estimate  
 Success one day; and, in the mean time—you!

I dare say there's some fancy of the sort  
 Frolicking round this final puff I send  
 To die up yonder in the ceiling-rose,—  
 Some consolation-stakes, we losers win!  
 A plague of the return to 'I—I—I  
 Did this, meant that, hoped, feared the other thing!'   
 Autobiography, adieu! The rest  
 Shall make amends, be pure blame, history  
 And falsehood: not the ineffective truth,  
 But Thiers-and-Victor-Hugo exercise.  
 Hear what I never was, but might have been  
 I' the better world where goes tobacco-smoke!  
 Here lie the dozen volumes of my life:  
 (Did I say 'lie'? the pregnant word will serve).  
 Cut on to the concluding chapter, though!  
 Because the little hours begin to strike.  
 Hurry Thiers-Hugo to the labour's end!

Something like this the unwritten chapter reads.

Exemplify the situation thus!  
 Hohenstiel-Schwangau, being, no dispute,  
 Absolute mistress, chose the Assembly, first,  
 To serve her: chose this man, its President  
 Afterward, to serve also,—specially  
 To see that folk did service one and all.  
 And now the proper term of years was out  
 When the Head-servant must vacate his place,  
 And nothing lay so patent to the world  
 As that his fellow-servants one and all  
 Were—mildly to make mention—knaves or fools,  
 Each of them with his promise flourished full  
 I' the face of you by word and impudence,  
 Or filtered slyly out by nod and wink  
 And nudge upon your sympathetic rib—



That not one minute more did knave or fool  
Mean to keep faith and serve as he had sworn  
Hohenstiel-Schwangau, once her Head away.  
Why should such swear except to get the chance,  
When time should ripen and confusion bloom,  
Of putting Hohenstiellers-Schwangauese  
To the true use of human property—  
Restoring souls and bodies, this to Pope,  
And that to King, that other to his planned  
Perfection of a Share-and-share-alike,  
That other still, to Empire absolute  
In shape of the Head-servant's very self  
Transformed to Master whole and sole? each scheme  
Discussible, concede one circumstance—  
That each scheme's parent were, beside himself,  
Hohenstiel-Schwangau, not her serving-man  
Sworn to do service in the way she chose  
Rather than his way: way superlative,  
Only,—by some infatuation,—his  
And his and his and every one's but hers  
Who stuck to just the Assembly and the Head.  
I make no doubt the Head, too, had his dream  
Of doing sudden duty swift and sure  
On all that heap of untrustworthiness—  
Catching each vaunter of the villainy  
He meant to perpetrate when time was ripe,  
Once the Head-servant fairly out of doors,—  
And, caging here a knave and there a fool,  
Cry 'Mistress of your servants, these and me.  
Hohenstiel-Schwangau! I, their trusty Head,  
Pounce on a pretty scheme concocting here  
That's stopped, extinguished by my vigilance.  
Your property is safe again: but mark!  
Safe in these hands, not yours, who lavish trust  
Too lightly. Leave my hands their charge awhile  
I know your business better than yourself:  
Let me alone about it! Some fine day,  
Once we are rid of the embarrassment,  
You shall look up and see your longings crowned!  
Such fancy might have tempted him be false,  
But this man chose truth and was wiser so.  
He recognized that for great minds i' the world  
There is no trial like the appropriate one

Of leaving little minds their liberty  
 Of littleness to blunder on through life,  
 Now, aiming at right ends by foolish means,  
 Now, at absurd achievement through the aid  
 Of good and wise endeavour—to acquiesce  
 In folly's life-long privilege, though with power  
 To do the little minds the good they need,  
 Despite themselves, by just abolishing  
 Their right to play the part and fill the place  
 I' the scheme of things He schemed who made alike  
 Great minds and little minds, saw use for each.  
 Could the orb sweep those puny particles  
 It just half-lights at distance, hardly leads  
 I' the leash—sweep out each speck of them from space  
 They anticize in with their days and nights  
 And whirlings round and dancings off, forsooth,  
 And all that fruitless individual life  
 One cannot lend a beam to but they spoil—  
 Sweep them into itself and so, one star,  
 Preponderate henceforth i' the heritage  
 Of heaven! No! in less senatorial phrase,  
 The man endured to help, not save outright  
 The multitude by substituting him  
 For them, his knowledge, will and way, for God's:  
 Nor change the world, such as it is, and was  
 And will be, for some other, suiting all  
 Except the purpose of the maker. No!  
 He saw that weakness, wickedness will be,  
 And therefore should be: that the perfect man  
 As we account perfection—at most pure  
 O' the special gold, whate'er the form it take,  
 Head-work or heart-work, fined and thrice-refined  
 I' the crucible of life, whereto the powers  
 Of the refiner, one and all, are flung  
 To feed the flame, he saw that e'en the block  
 Such perfect man holds out triumphant, breaks  
 Into some poisonous ore, gold's opposite,  
 At the very purest, so compensating  
 Man's Adversary—what if we believe?—  
 For earlier stern exclusion of his stuff.  
 See the sage, with the hunger for the truth,  
 And see his system that 's all true, except  
 The one weak place that 's stanchioned by a lie!

The moralist who walks with head erect  
I' the crystal clarity of air so long,  
Until a stumble, and the man's one mire!  
Philanthropy undoes the social knot  
With axe-edge, makes love room 'twixt head and trunk:  
Religion—but, enough, the thing's too clear!  
Well, if these sparks break out i' the greenest tree,  
Our topmost of performance, yours and mine,  
What will be done i' the dry ineptitude  
Of ordinary mankind, bark and bole,  
All seems ashamed of but their mother-earth?  
Therefore throughout Head's term of servitude  
He did the appointed service, and forbore  
Extraneous action that were duty else,  
Done by some other servant, idle now  
Or mischievous: no matter, each his own—  
Own task, and, in the end, own praise or blame!  
He suffered them strut, prate and brag their best,  
Squabble at odds on every point save one,  
And there shake hands,—agree to trifle time,  
Obstruct advance with, each, his cricket-cry  
'Wait till the Head be off the shoulders here!  
Then comes my King, my Pope, my Autocrat,  
My Socialist Republic to her own—  
To wit, that property of only me,  
Hohenstiel-Schwangau who conceits herself  
Free, forsooth, and expects I keep her so!  
—Nay, suffered when, perceiving with dismay  
Head's silence paid no tribute to their noise,  
They turned on him. 'Dumb menace in that mouth,  
Malice in that unstridulosity!  
He cannot but intend some stroke of state  
Shall signalize his passage into peace  
Out of the creaking,—hinder transference  
O' the Hohenstiellers-Schwangauese to king,  
Pope, autocrat, or socialist republic! That's  
Exact the cause his lips unlocked would cry!  
Therefore be stirring: brave, beard, bully him!  
Dock, by the million, of its friendly joints,  
The electoral body short at once! who did,  
May do again, and undo us beside.  
Wrest from his hands the sword for self-defence,  
The right to parry any thrust in play

We peradventure please to meditate!  
 And so forth; creak, creak, creak: and ne'er a line  
 His locked mouth oped the wider, till at last  
 O' the long degraded and insulting day,  
 Sudden the clock told it was judgment-time.  
 Then he addressed himself to speak indeed  
 To the fools, not knaves: they saw him walk straight  
 down

Each step of the eminence, as he first engaged,  
 And stand at last o' the level,—all he swore.  
 'People, and not the people's varletry,  
 This is the task you set myself and these!  
 Thus I performed my part of it, and thus  
 They thwarted me throughout, here, here, and here:  
 Study each instance! yours the loss, not mine.  
 What they intend now is demonstrable  
 As plainly: here 's such man, and here 's such mode  
 Of making you some other than the thing  
 You, wisely or unwisely, choose to be,  
 And only set him up to keep you so.  
 Do you approve this? Yours the loss, not mine.  
 Do you condemn it? There 's a remedy.  
 Take me—who know your mind, and mean your good,  
 With clearer brain and stouter arm than they,  
 Or you, or haply anybody else—  
 And make me master for the moment! Choose  
 What time, what power you trust me with: I too  
 Will choose as frankly ere I trust myself  
 With time and power: they must be adequate  
 To the end and aim, since mine the loss, with yours,  
 If means be wanting; once their worth approved,  
 Grant them, and I shall forthwith operate—  
 Ponder it well!—to the extremest stretch  
 O' the power you trust me: if with unsuccess,  
 God wills it, and there 's nobody to blame.'

Whereon the people answered with a shout  
 'The trusty one! no tricksters any more!'  
 How could they other? He was in his place.  
 What followed? Just what he foresaw, what proved  
 The soundness of both judgments,—his, o' the knaves  
 And fools, each trickster with his dupe,—and theirs,  
 The people's, in what head and arm could help.

There was uprising, masks dropped, flags unfurled,  
Weapons outflourished in the wind, my faith!  
Heavily did he let his fist fall plumb  
On each perturber of the public peace,  
No matter whose the wagging head it broke—  
From bald-pate craft and greed and impudence  
Of night-hawk at first chance to prowl and prey  
For glory and a little gain beside,  
Passing for eagle in the dusk of the age,—  
To florid head-top, foamy patriotism  
And tribunitial daring, breast laid bare  
Thro' confidence in rectitude, with hand  
On private pistol in the pocket: these  
And all the dupes of these, who lent themselves  
As dust and feather do, to help offence  
O' the wind that whirls them at you, then subsides  
In safety somewhere, leaving filth afloat,  
Annoyance you may brush from eyes and beard,—  
These he stopped: bade the wind's spite howl or whine  
Its worst outside the building, wind conceives  
Meant to be pulled together and become  
Its natural playground so. What foolishness  
Of dust or feather proved importunate  
And fell 'twixt thumb and finger, found them gripe  
To detriment of bulk and buoyancy.  
Then followed silence and submission. Next,  
The inevitable comment came on work  
And work's cost: he was censured as profuse  
Of human life and liberty: too swift  
And thorough his procedure, who had lagged  
At the outset, lost the opportunity  
Through timid scruples as to right and wrong.  
'There 's no such certain mark of a small mind'  
(So did Sagacity explain the fault)  
'As when it needs must square away and sink  
To its own small dimensions, private scale  
Of right and wrong,—humanity i' the large,  
The right and wrong of the universe, forsooth!  
This man addressed himself to guard and guide  
Hohenstiel-Schwangau. When the case demands  
He frustrate villiany in the egg, unhatched,  
With easy stamp and minimum of pang  
E'en to the punished reptile, "There 's my oath

Restrains my foot," objects our guide and guard,  
 "I must leave guardianship and guidance now:  
 Rather than stretch one handbreadth of the law,  
 I am bound to see it break from end to end.  
 First show me death i' the body politic:  
 Then prescribe pill and potion, what may please  
 Hohenstiel-Schwangau! all is for her sake:  
 'T was she ordained my service should be so.  
 What if the event demonstrate her unwise,  
 If she unwill the thing she willed before?  
 I hold to the letter and obey the bond  
 And leave her to perdition loyally."  
 Whence followed thrice the expenditure we blame  
 Of human life and liberty: for want  
 O' the by-blow, came deliberate butcher's-work!  
 'Elsewhere go carry your complaint!' bade he.  
 'Least, largest, there 's one law for all the minds,  
 Here or above: be true at any price!  
 'T is just o' the great scale, that such happy stroke  
 Of falsehood would be found a failure. Truth  
 Still stands unshaken at her base by me,  
 Reigns paramount i' the world, for the large good  
 O' the long late generations,—I and you  
 Forgotten like this buried foolishness!  
 Not so the good I rooted in its grave.'

This is why he refused to break his oath,  
 Rather appealed to the people, gained the power  
 To act as he thought best, then used it, once  
 For all, no matter what the consequence  
 To knaves and fools. As thus began his sway,  
 So, through its twenty years, one rule of right  
 Sufficed him: govern for the many first,  
 The poor mean multitude, all mouths and eyes:  
 Bid the few, better favoured in the brain,  
 Be patient nor presume on privilege,  
 Help him or else be quiet,—never crave  
 That he help them,—increase, forsooth, the gulf  
 Yawning so terribly 'twixt mind and mind  
 I' the world here, which his purpose was to block  
 At bottom, were it by an inch, and bridge,  
 If by a filament, no more, at top.  
 Equalize things a little! And the way



He took to work that purpose out, was plain  
Enough to intellect and honesty  
And—superstition, style it if you please,  
So long as you allow there was no lack  
O' the quality imperative in man—  
Reverence. You see deeper? thus saw he,  
And by the light he saw, must walk: how else  
Was he to do his part? a man's, with might  
And main, and not a faintest touch of fear,  
Sure he was in the hand of God who comes  
Before and after, with a work to do  
Which no man helps nor hinders. Thus the man,—  
So timid when the business was to touch  
The uncertain order of humanity,  
Imperil, for a problematic cure  
Of grievance on the surface, any good  
I' the deep of things, dim yet discernible—  
This same man, so irresolute before,  
Show him a true excrescence to cut sheer,  
A devil's-graft on God's foundation-stock,  
Then—no complaint of indecision more!  
He wrenched out the whole canker, root and branch,  
Deaf to who cried that earth would tumble in  
At its four corners if he touched a twig.  
Witness that lie of lies, arch-infamy,  
When the Republic, with her life involved  
In just this law—'Each people rules itself  
Its own way, not as any stranger please'—  
Turned, and for first proof she was living, bade  
Hohenstiel-Schwangau fasten on the throat  
Of the first neighbour that claimed benefit  
O' the law herself established: 'Hohenstiel  
For Hohenstiellers! Rome, by parity  
Of reasoning, for Romans? That's a jest  
Wants proper treatment,—lancet-puncture suits  
The proud flesh: Rome ape Hohenstiel forsooth!'   
And so the siege and slaughter and success  
Whereof we nothing doubt that Hohenstiel  
Will have to pay the price, in God's good time  
Which does not always fall on Saturday  
When the world looks for wages. Anyhow,  
He found this infamy triumphant. Well:  
Sagacity suggested, make this speech!

'The work was none of mine: suppose wrong wait,  
 Stand over for redressing? Mine for me,  
 My predecessors' work on their own head!  
 Meantime there's plain advantage, should we leave  
 Things as we find them. Keep Rome manacled  
 Hand and foot: no fear of unruliness!  
 Her foes consent to even seem our friends  
 So long, no longer. Then, there's glory got  
 By boldness and bravado to the world:  
 The disconcerted world must grin and bear  
 The old saucy writing, "Grunt thereat who may,  
 So shall things be, for such my pleasure is—  
 Hohenstiel-Schwangau's." How that reads in Rome  
 I' the Capitol where Brennus broke his pate,  
 And lends a flourish to our journalists!'

Only it was nor read nor flourished of,  
 Since, not a moment did such glory stay  
 Excision of the canker! Out it came,  
 Root and branch, with much roaring, and some blood,  
 And plentiful abuse of him from friend  
 And foe. Who cared? Not Nature who assuaged  
 The pain and set the patient on his legs  
 Promptly: the better! had it been the worse,  
 'T is Nature you must try conclusions with,  
 Not he, since nursing canker kills the sick  
 For certain, while to cut may cure, at least.  
 'Ah,' groaned a second time Sagacity,  
 'Again the little mind, precipitate,  
 Rash, rude, when even in the right, as here!  
 The great mind knows the power of gentleness,  
 Only tries force because persuasion fails.  
 Had this man, by prelusive trumpet-blast,  
 Signified "Truth and Justice mean to come,  
 Nay, fast approach your threshold! Ere they knock,  
 See that the house be set in order, swept  
 And garnished, windows shut, and doors thrown wide!  
 The free State comes to visit the free Church:  
 Receive her! or . . . or . . . never mind what  
 else!"

Thus moral suasion heralding brute force,  
 How had he seen the old abuses die,  
 And new life kindle here, there, everywhere,  
 Roused simply by that mild yet potent spell—

Beyond or beat of drum or stroke of sword—  
Public opinion!’

‘How, indeed?’ he asked,  
‘When all to see, after some twenty years,  
Were your own fool-face waiting for the sight,  
Faced by as wide a grin from ear to ear  
O’ the knaves who, while the fools were waiting,  
worked—  
Broke yet another generation’s heart—  
Twenty years’ respite helping! Teach your nurse  
“Compliance with, before you suck, the teat!”  
Find what that means, and meanwhile hold your tongue!’

Whereof the war came which he knew must be.

Now, this had proved the dry-rot of the race  
He ruled o’er, that, i’ the old day, when was need  
They fought for their own liberty and life,  
Well did they fight, none better: whence, such love  
Of fighting somehow still for fighting’s sake  
Against no matter whose the liberty  
And life, so long as self-conceit should crow  
And clap the wing, while justice sheathed her claw,—  
That what had been the glory of the world  
When thereby came the world’s good, grew its plague  
Now that the champion-armour, donned to dare  
The dragon once, was clattered up and down  
Highway and by-path of the world at peace,  
Merely to mask marauding, or for sake  
O’ the shine and rattle that apprized the fields  
Hohenstiel-Schwangau was a fighter yet,  
And would be, till the weary world suppressed  
Her peccant humours out of fashion now.  
Accordingly the world spoke plain at last,  
Promised to punish who next played with fire.

So, at his advent, such discomfiture  
Taking its true shape of beneficence,  
Hohenstiel-Schwangau, half-sad and part-wise,  
Sat: if with wistful eye reverting oft  
To each pet weapon, rusty on its peg,  
Yet, with a sigh of satisfaction too

That, peacefulness become the law, herself  
 Got the due share of godsend in its train,  
 Cried shame and took advantage quietly.  
 Still, so the dry-rot had been nursed into  
 Blood, bones and marrow, that, from worst to best,  
 All,—clearest brains and soundest hearts save here,—  
 All had this lie acceptable for law  
 Plain as the sun at noonday—‘War is best,  
 Peace is worst; peace we only tolerate  
 As needful preparation for new war:  
 War may be for whatever end we will—  
 Peace only as the proper help thereto.  
 Such is the law of right and wrong for us  
 Hohenstiel-Schwangau: for the other world,  
 As naturally, quite another law.  
 Are we content? The world is satisfied.  
 Discontent? Then the world must give us leave  
 To strike right, left, and exercise our arm  
 Torpid of late through overmuch repose,  
 And show its strength is still superlative  
 At somebody’s expense in life or limb:  
 Which done,—let peace succeed and last a year!’  
 Such devil’s-doctrine so was judged God’s law,  
 We say, when this man stepped upon the stage,  
 That it had seemed a venial fault at most  
 Had he once more obeyed Sagacity.  
 ‘You come i’ the happy interval of peace,  
 The favourable weariness from war:  
 Prolong it! artfully, as if intent  
 On ending peace as soon as possible.  
 Quietly so increase the sweets of ease  
 And safety, so employ the multitude,  
 Put hod and trowel so in idle hands,  
 So stuff and stop up wagging jaws with bread,  
 That selfishness shall surreptitiously  
 Do wisdom’s office, whisper in the ear  
 Of Hohenstiel-Schwangau, there’s a pleasant feel  
 In being gently forced down, pinioned fast  
 To the easy arm-chair by the pleading arms  
 O’ the world beseeching her to there abide  
 Content with all the harm done hitherto,  
 And let herself be petted in return,  
 Free to re-wage, in speech and prose and verse,

The old unjust wars, nay—in verse and prose  
And speech,—to vaunt new victories shall prove  
A plague o' the future,—so that words suffice  
For present comfort, and no deeds denote  
That—tired of illimitable line on line  
Of boulevard-building, tired o' the theatre  
With the tuneful thousand in their thrones above,  
For glory of the male intelligence,  
And Nakedness in her due niche below,  
For illustration of the female use—  
That she, 'twixt yawn and sigh, prepares to slip  
Out of the arm-chair, wants fresh blood again  
From over the boundary, to colour-up  
The sheeny sameness, keep the world aware  
Hohenstiel-Schwangau's arm needs exercise  
Despite the petting of the universe!  
Come, you're a city-builder: what's the way  
Wisdom takes when time needs that she entice  
Some fierce tribe, castled on the mountain-peak,  
Into the quiet and amenity  
O' the meadow-land below? By crying "Done  
With fight now, down with fortress?" Rather—"Dare  
On, dare ever, not a stone displace!"  
Cries Wisdom: "Cradle of our ancestors,  
Be bulwark, give our children safety still!  
Who of our children please may stoop and taste  
O' the valley-fatness, unafraid,—for why?  
At first alarm they have thy mother-ribs  
To run upon for refuge: foes forget  
Scarcely that Terror on her vantage-coign,  
Couchant supreme among the powers of air,  
Watches—prepared to pounce—the country wide!"  
Meanwhile the encouraged valley holds its own,  
From the first hut's adventure in descent,  
Half home, half hiding place,—to dome and spire  
Befitting the assured metropolis:  
Nor means offence to the fort which caps the crag,  
All undismantled of a turret-stone,  
And bears the banner-pole that creaks at times  
Embarrassed by the old emblazonment,  
When festal days are to commemorate:  
Otherwise left untenanted, no doubt,  
Since, never fear, our myriads from below

Would rush, if needs were, man the walls again,  
 Renew the exploits of the earlier time  
 At moment's notice! But till notice sound,  
 Inhabit we in ease and opulence!"

And so, till one day thus a notice sounds,  
 Not trumpeted, but in a whisper-gust  
 Fitfully playing through mute city streets  
 At midnight weary of day's feast and game—  
 "Friends, your famed fort's a ruin past repair!  
 Its use is—to proclaim it had a use  
 Obsolete long since. Climb and study there  
 How to paint barbican and battlement  
 I' the scenes of our new theatre! We fight  
 Now—by forbidding neighbours to sell steel  
 Or buy wine, not by blowing out their brains!  
 Moreover, while we let time sap the strength  
 O' the walls omnipotent in menace once,  
 Neighbours would seem to have prepared surprise—  
 Run up defences in a mushroom-growth,  
 For all the world like what we boasted: brief—  
 Hohenstiel-Schwangau's policy is peace!"

Ay, so Sagacity advised him filch  
 Folly from fools: handsomely substitute  
 The dagger o' lath, while gay they sang and danced,  
 For that long dangerous sword they liked to feel,  
 Even at feast-time, clink and make friends start.  
 No! he said 'Hear the truth, and bear the truth,  
 And bring the truth to bear on all you are  
 And do, assured that only good comes thence  
 Whate'er the shape good take! While I have rule,  
 Understand!—war for war's sake, war for sake  
 O' the good war gets you as war's sole excuse,  
 Is damnable and damned shall be. You want  
 Glory? Why so do I, and so does God.  
 Where is it found,—in this paraded shame,—  
 One particle of glory? Once you warred  
 For liberty against the world, and won:  
 There was the glory. Now, you fain would war  
 Because the neighbour prospers overmuch,—  
 Because there has been silence half-an-hour,  
 Like Heaven on earth, without a cannon-shot  
 Announcing Hohenstielers-Schwangauese



Are minded to disturb the jubilee,—  
Because the loud tradition echoes faint,  
And who knows but posterity may doubt  
If the great deeds were ever done at all,  
Much less believe, were such to do again,  
So the event would follow: therefore, prove  
The old power, at the expense of somebody!  
Oh Glory,—gilded bubble, bard and sage  
So nickname rightly,—would thy dance endure  
One moment, would thy vaunting make believe  
Only one eye thy ball was solid gold,  
Hadst thou less breath to buoy thy vacancy  
Than a whole multitude expends in praise,  
Less range for roaming than from head to head  
Of a whole people? Flit, fall, fly again,  
Only, fix never where the resolute hand  
May prick thee, prove the glassy lie thou art!  
Give me real intellect to reason with  
No multitude, no entity that apes  
One wise man, being but a million fools!  
How and whence wishest glory, thou wise one?  
Wouldst get it,—didst thyself guide Providence,—  
By stinting of his due each neighbour round  
In strength and knowledge and dexterity  
So as to have thy littleness grow large  
By all those somethings once, turned nothings now,  
As children make a molehill mountainous  
By scooping out a trench around their pile,  
And saving so the mudwork from approach?  
Quite otherwise the cheery game of life,  
True yet mimetic warfare, whereby man  
Does his best with his utmost, and so ends  
A victor most of all in fair defeat.  
Who thinks,—would he have no one think beside?  
Who knows, who does,—save his must learning die  
And action cease? Why, so our giant proves  
No better than a dwarf, once rivalry  
Prostrate around him. Let the whole race stand  
For him to try conclusions fairly with!  
Show me the great man would engage his peer  
Rather by grinning "Cheat, thy gold is brass!"  
Than granting "Perfect piece of purest ore!  
Still, is it less good mintage, this of mine?"

Well, and these right and sound results of soul  
 I' the strong and healthy one wise man,—shall such  
 Be vainly sought for, scornfully renounced  
 I' the multitude that make the entity—  
 The people?—to what purpose, if no less,  
 In power and purity of soul, below  
 The reach of the unit than, by multiplied  
 Might of the body, vulgarized the more,  
 Above, in thick and threefold brutishness?  
 See! you accept such one wise man, myself:  
 Wiser or less wise, still I operate  
 From my own stock of wisdom, nor exact  
 Of other sort of natures you admire,  
 That whoso rhymes a sonnet pays a tax,  
 Who paints a landscape dips brush at his cost,  
 Who scores a septett true for strings and wind  
 Mulcted must be—else how should I impose  
 Properly, attitudinize aright,  
 Did such conflicting claims as these divert  
 Hohenstiel-Schwangau from observing me?  
 Therefore, what I find facile, you be sure,  
 With effort or without it, you shall dare—  
 You, I aspire to make my better self  
 And truly the Great Nation. No more war  
 For war's sake, then! and,—seeing, wickedness  
 Springs out of folly,—no more foolish dread  
 O' the neighbour waxing too inordinate  
 A rival, through his gain of wealth and ease!  
 What?—keep me patient, Powers!—the people here,  
 Earth presses to her heart, nor owns a pride  
 Above her pride i' the race all flame and air  
 And aspiration to the boundless Great,  
 The incommensurably Beautiful—  
 Whose very falterings groundward come of flight  
 Urged by a pinion all too passionate  
 For heaven and what it holds of gloom and glow:  
 Bravest of thinkers, bravest of the brave  
 Doers, exalt in Science, rapturous  
 In Art, the—more than all—magnetic race  
 To fascinate their fellows, mould mankind  
 Hohenstiel-Schwangau-fashion,—these, what?—these  
 Will have to abdicate their primacy  
 Should such a nation sell them steel untaxed,

And such another take itself, on hire  
For the natural sen'night, somebody for lord  
Unpatronized by me whose back was turned?  
Or such another yet would fain build bridge,  
Lay rail, drive tunnel, busy its poor self  
With its appropriate fancy: so there 's—flash—  
Hohenstiel-Schwangau up in arms at once!  
Genius has somewhat of the infantine:  
But of the childish, not a touch nor taint  
Except through self-will, which, being foolishness,  
Is certain, soon or late, of punishment  
Which Providence avert!—and that it may  
Avert what both of us would so deserve,  
No foolish dread o' the neighbour, I enjoin!  
By consequence, no wicked war with him,  
While I rule!

Does that mean—no war at all  
When just the wickedness I here proscribe  
Comes, haply, from the neighbour? Does my speech  
Precede the praying that you beat the sword  
To ploughshare, and the spear to pruning-hook,  
And sit down henceforth under your own vine  
And fig tree through the sleepy summer month,  
Letting what hurly-burly please explode  
On the other side the mountain-frontier? No,  
Beloved! I foresee and I announce  
Necessity of warfare in one case,  
For one cause: one way, I bid broach the blood  
O' the world. For truth and right, and only right  
And truth,—right, truth, on the absolute scale of God,  
No pettiness of man's admeasurement,—  
In such case only, and for such one cause,  
Fight your hearts out, whatever fate betide  
Hands energetic to the uttermost!  
Lie not! Endure no lie which needs your heart  
And hand to push it out of mankind's path—  
No lie that lets the natural forces work  
Too long ere lay it plain and pulverized—  
Seeing man's life lasts only twenty years!  
And such a lie, before both man and God,  
Proving, at this time present, Austria's rule  
O'er Italy,—for Austria's sake the first,

Italy's next, and our sake last of all,  
 Come with me and deliver Italy!  
 Smite hip and thigh until the oppressor leave  
 Free from the Adriatic to the Alps  
 The oppressed one! We were they who laid her low  
 In the old bad day when Villainy braved Truth  
 And Right, and laughed "Henceforward, God deposed,  
 Satan we set to rule for evermore  
 I' the world!"—whereof to stop the consequence,  
 And for atonement of false glory there  
 Gaped at and gabbled over by the world,  
 I purpose to get God enthroned again  
 For what the world will gird at as sheer shame  
 I' the cost of blood and treasure. "All for nought—  
 Not even, say, some patch of province, splice  
 O' the frontier?—some snug honorarium-fee  
 Shut into glove and pocketed apace?"  
 (Questions Sagacity) "in deference  
 To the natural susceptibility  
 Of folks at home, unwitting of that pitch  
 You soar to, and misdoubting if Truth, Right  
 And the other such augustnesses repay  
 Expenditure in coin o' the realm,—but prompt  
 To recognize the cession of Savoy  
 And Nice as marketable value!" No,  
 Sagacity, go preach to Metternich,  
 And, sermon ended, stay where he resides!  
 Hohenstiel-Schwangau, you and I must march  
 The other road! war for the hate of war,  
 Not love, this once!' So Italy was free.

What else noteworthy and commendable  
 I' the man's career?—that he was resolute  
 No trepidation, much less treachery  
 On his part, should imperil from its poise  
 The ball o' the world, heaved up at such expense  
 Of pains so far, and ready to rebound,  
 Let but a finger maladroitly fall,  
 Under pretence of making fast and sure  
 The inch gained by late volubility,  
 And run itself back to the ancient rest  
 At foot o' the mountain. Thus he ruled, gave proof  
 The world had gained a point, progressive so,

By choice, this time, as will and power concurred,  
 O' the fittest man to rule; not chance of birth,  
 Or such-like dice-throw. Oft Sagacity  
 Was at his ear: 'Confirm this clear advance,  
 Support this wise procedure! You, elect  
 O' the people, mean to justify their choice  
 And out-king all the kingly imbeciles;  
 But that 's just half the enterprise: remains  
 You find them a successor like yourself,  
 In head and heart and eye and hand and aim,  
 Or all done 's undone; and whom hope to mould  
 So like you as the pupil Nature sends,  
 The son and heir's completeness which you lack?  
 Lack it no longer! Wed the pick o' the world,  
 Where'er you think you find it. Should she be  
 A queen,—tell Hohenstiellers-Schwangauese  
 "So do the old enthroned decrepitudes  
 Acknowledge, in the rotten hearts of them  
 Their knell is knolled, they hasten to make peace  
 With the new order, recognize in me  
 Your right to constitute what king you will,  
 Cringe therefore crown in hand and bride on arm,  
 To both of us: we triumph, I suppose!"  
 Is it the other sort of rank?—bright eye,  
 Soft smile, and so forth, all her queenly boast?  
 Undaunted the exordium—"I, the man  
 O' the people, with the people mate myself:  
 So stand, so fall. Kings, keep your crowns and brides!  
 Our progeny (if Providence agree)  
 Shall live to tread the baubles underfoot  
 And bid the scarecrows consort with their kin.  
 For son, as for his sire, be the free wife  
 In the free state!"

That is, Sagacity  
 Would prop up one more lie, the most of all  
 Pernicious fancy that the son and heir  
 Receives the genius from the sire, himself  
 Transmits as surely,—ask experience else!  
 Which answers,—never was so plain a truth  
 As that God drops his seed of heavenly flame  
 Just where He wills on earth: sometimes where man  
 Seems to tempt—such the accumulated store

Of faculties—one spark to fire the heap;  
 Sometimes where, fire-ball-like, it falls upon  
 The naked unpreparedness of rock,  
 Burns, beaconing the nations through their night.  
 Faculties, fuel for the flame? All helps  
 Come, ought to come, or come not, crossed by chance,  
 From culture and transmission. What 's your want  
 I' the son and heir? Sympathy, aptitude,  
 Teachableness, the fuel for the flame?  
 You 'll have them for your pains: but the flame's self,  
 The novel thought of God shall light the world?  
 No, poet, though your offspring rhyme and chime  
 I' the cradle,—painter, no, for all your pet  
 Draws his first eye, beats Salvatore's boy,—  
 And thrice no, statesman, should your progeny  
 Tie bib and tucker with no tape but red,  
 And make a foolscap-kite of protocols!  
 Critic and copyist and bureaucrat  
 To heart's content! The seed o' the apple tree  
 Brings forth another tree which bears a crab:  
 'T is the great gardener grafts the excellence  
 On wildings where he will.

‘How plain I view,  
 Across those misty years ’twixt me and Rome’—  
 (Such the man's answer to Sagacity)  
 ‘The little wayside temple, half-way down  
 To a mild river that makes oxen white  
 Miraculously, un-mouse-colours skin,  
 Or so the Roman country people dream!  
 I view that sweet small shrub-embedded shrine  
 On the declivity, was sacred once  
 To a transmuting Genius of the land,  
 Could touch and turn its dunnest natures bright,  
 —Since Italy means the Land of the Ox, we know.  
 Well, how was it the due succession fell  
 From priest to priest who ministered i' the cool  
 Calm fane o' the Clitumnian god? The sire  
 Brought forth a son and sacerdotal sprout,  
 Endowed instinctively with good and grace  
 To suit the gliding gentleness below—  
 Did he? Tradition tells another tale.  
 Each priest obtained his predecessor's staff,



Robe, fillet and insignia, blamelessly,  
By springing out of ambush, soon or late,  
And slaying him: the initiative rite  
Simply was murder, save that murder took,  
I' the case, another and religious name.  
So it was once, is now, shall ever be  
With genius and its priesthood in this world:  
The new power slays the old—but handsomely.  
There he lies, not diminished by an inch  
Of stature that he graced the altar with,  
Though somebody of other bulk and build  
Cries "What a goodly personage lies here  
Reddening the water where the bulrush roots!  
May I conduct the service in his place,  
Decently and in order, as did he,  
And, as he did not, keep a wary watch  
When meditating 'neath yon willow shade!"  
Find out your best man, sure the son of him  
Will prove best man again, and, better still  
Somehow than best, the grandson-prodigy!  
You think the world would last another day  
Did we so make us masters of the trick  
Whereby the works go, we could pre-arrange  
Their play and reach perfection when we please?  
Depend on it, the change and the surprise  
Are part o' the plan: 't is we wish steadiness;  
Nature prefers a motion by unrest,  
Advancement through this force which jostles that.  
And so, since much remains i' the world to see,  
Here 's the world still, affording God the sight.'  
Thus did the man refute Sagacity  
Ever at this old whisper in his ear:  
'Here are you picked out, by a miracle,  
And placed conspicuously enough, folks say  
And you believe, by Providence outright  
Taking a new way—nor without success—  
To put the world upon its mettle: good!  
But Fortune alternates with Providence;  
Resource is soon exhausted. Never count  
On such a happy hit occurring twice!  
Try the old method next time!'

‘Old enough,’  
 (At whisper in his ear, the laugh outbroke)  
 ‘And mode the most discredited of all,  
 By just the men and women who make boast  
 They are kings and queens thereby! Mere self-defence  
 Should teach them, on one chapter of the law  
 Must be no sort of trifling—chastity:  
 They stand or fall, as their progenitors  
 Were chaste or unchaste. Now, run eye around  
 My crowned acquaintance, give each life its look  
 And no more,—why, you ’d think each life was led  
 Purposely for example of what pains  
 Who leads it took to cure the prejudice,  
 And prove there ’s nothing so unprovable  
 As who is who, what son of what a sire,  
 And,—inferentially,—how faint the chance  
 That the next generation needs to fear  
 Another fool o’ the selfsame type as he  
 Happily regnant now by right divine  
 And luck o’ the pillow! No: select your lord  
 By the direct employment of your brains  
 As best you may,—bad as the blunder prove,  
 A far worse evil stank beneath the sun  
 When some legitimate blockhead managed so  
 Matters that high time was to interfere,  
 Though interference came from hell itself  
 And not the blind mad miserable mob  
 Happily ruled so long by pillow-luck  
 And divine right,—by lies in short, not truth.  
 And meanwhile use the allotted minute . . .

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One,—  
 Two, three, four, five—yes, five the *pendule* warns!  
 Eh? Why, this wild work wanders past all bound  
 And bearing! Exile, Leicester-square, the life  
 I’ the old gay miserable time, rehearsed,  
 Tried on again like cast clothes, still to serve  
 At a pinch, perhaps? ‘Who ’s who?’ was aptly asked  
 Since certainly I am not I! since when?  
 Where is the bud-mouthed arbitress? A nod  
 Out-Homer Homer! Stay—there flits the clue  
 I fain would find the end of! Yes,—‘Meanwhile.

Use the allotted minute!' Well, you see,  
(Veracious and imaginary Thiers,  
Who map out thus the life I might have led,  
But did not,—all the worse for earth and me—  
Doff spectacles, wipe pen, shut book, decamp!)  
You see 't is easy in heroics! Plain  
Pedestrian speech shall help me perorate.  
Ah, if one had no need to use the tongue!  
How obvious and how easy 't is to talk  
Inside the soul, a ghostly dialogue—  
Instincts with guesses,—instinct, guess, again  
With dubious knowledge, half-experience: each  
And all the interlocutors alike  
Subordinating,—as decorum bids,  
Oh, never fear! but still decisively,—  
Claims from without that take too high a tone,  
—('God wills this, man wants that, the dignity  
Prescribed a prince would wish the other thing')—  
Putting them back to insignificance  
Beside one intimatest fact—myself  
Am first to be considered, since I live  
Twenty years longer and then end, perhaps!  
But, where one ceases to soliloquize,  
Somehow the motives, that did well enough  
I' the darkness, when you bring them into light  
Are found, like those famed cave-fish, to lack eye  
And organ for the upper magnitudes.  
The other common creatures, of less fine  
Existence, that acknowledge earth and heaven,  
Have it their own way in the argument.  
Yes, forced to speak, one stoops to say—one's aim  
Was—what it peradventure should have been:  
To renovate a people, mend or end  
That bane come of a blessing meant the world—  
Inordinate culture of the sense made quick  
By soul,—the lust o' the flesh, lust of the eye,  
And pride of life,—and, consequent on these,  
The worship of that prince o' the power o' the air  
Who paints the cloud and fills the emptiness  
And bids his votaries, famishing for truth,  
Feed on a lie.

Alack, one lies oneself  
 Even in the stating that one's end was truth,  
 Truth only, if one states as much in words!  
 Give me the inner chamber of the soul  
 For obvious easy argument! 't is there  
 One pits the silent truth against a lie—  
 Truth which breaks shell a careless simple bird,  
 Nor wants a gorget nor a beak filed fine,  
 Steel spurs, and the whole armoury o' the tongue,  
 To equalize the odds. But, do your best,  
 Words have to come: and somehow words deflect  
 As the best cannon ever rifled will.

'Deflect' indeed! nor merely words from thoughts  
 But names from facts: 'Clitumnus' did I say?  
 As if it had been his ox-whitening wave  
 Whereby folk practised that grim cult of old—  
 The murder of their temple's priest by who  
 Would qualify for his succession. Sure—  
 Nemi was the true lake's style. Dream had need  
 Of the ox-whitening piece of prettiness  
 And so confused names, well known once awake.  
 So, i' the Residenz yet, not Leicester-square,  
 Alone,—no such congenial intercourse!—  
 My reverie concludes, as dreaming should,  
 With daybreak: nothing done and over yet,  
 Except cigars! The adventure thus may be,  
 Or never needs to be at all: who knows?  
 My Cousin-Duke, perhaps, at whose hard head  
 —Is it, now—is this letter to be launched,  
 The sight of whose grey oblong, whose grim seal,  
 Set all these fancies floating for an hour?

Twenty years are good gain, come what come will?  
 Double or quits! The letter goes! Or stays?







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